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Roadside Memorial Practices: An Examination of Landscapes of Commemoration in Warren County, Kentucky

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ROADSIDE MEMORIAL PRACTICES: AN EXAMINATION OF LANDSCAPES OF
COMMEMORATION IN WARREN COUNTY, KENTUCKY

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of Geography & Geology
Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Science

By
Michael Richard Briggs

May 2004

ROADSIDE MEMORIAL PRACTICES: AN EXAMINATION OF LANDSCAPES OF
COMMEMORATION IN WARREN COUNTY, KENTUCKY

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The work contained in these pages reflects an aspect of life that is often overlooked. It is with this research that I wish all people would take time to look at their surroundings and question the things we take for granted. Why is it there, and what does it mean? You will discover that simple things in life can tell you so much about people's thoughts and intentions. These inferences and perceptions are important in shaping people's lives and social interactions. You will find yourself being consumed with the implications of these small treasures.

This project started only as an idea that crossed a grad student's mind one day. Thank you to all the professors that continually encouraged me to pursue this research over the past two years. Dr. Algeo, I must say a special thank you for providing me with the skills to undertake such a cultural study and for your input and suggestions on the many drafts of this document. Also, thank you to the rest of the thesis committee members for their editing and tireless work in providing input with so many other responsibilities in their hands.

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ROADSIDE MEMORIAL PRACTICES: AN EXAMINATION OF LANDSCAPES OF COMMEMORATION IN WARREN COUNTY, KENTUCKY

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112 Pages

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Roadside memorials commemorating the death of automobile crash victims are scattered throughout the Kentucky landscape. This persistent cultural practice contains symbolic elements oftentimes indicative of religious connotations. Because there is a constitutional separation of church and government in the United States, these memorials can prelude controversy if located on state-maintained rights-of-way. This study examines Warren County, Kentucky, and analyzes the spatial distribution of these memorials on the landscape and the cultural implications to society because of their ties to death and dying.

Scientific research in various fields of psychology, sociology, folk studies, geoscience, and religious studies was analyzed, including religious census information. Additionally, state departments of transportation were queried on policies relating to roadside memorials to develop a foundation for research in Warren County. A GPS unit was utilized to develop a roadside memorial database, and GIS was used to map the locations of these memorials in relation to the Bowling Green urban area, road types, and other factors. A typology based on the symbolic elements composing the memorials was constructed to analyze the database further. Qualitative information was also gathered while performing fieldwork to gain some insight into people's perceptions about roadside memorials.

This study concludes that roadside memorial construction is a persistent cultural

practice, is a controversial issue shaped by local policies and social influences, and is not necessarily restricted to one road type. In terms of Warren County, Kentucky, roadside memorials exist throughout the county, typically on state-maintained, heavier-traveled roadways. They are found in rural areas along two-lane highways, but also exist in urban areas. Roadside memorials reflect the region's tie to Christianity, particularly the Southern Baptist denomination of the Protestant faith, and they are not encouraged, discouraged, or prohibited by local, state, or federal policies.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Religion and culture are so intertwined that the average person often does not realize the important impact religion has on society, especially in the United States where there is a constitutional separation of religion and government. Vernacular religion is often overlooked on the earth's landscape even though much of American history has been influenced by religion, particularly Christianity. Displays of this influence are apparent throughout the country. These symbols and artifacts are personal expression for those constructing them and are readable as text to those encountering them (Crang 1998b). Reading the landscape is a skill cultivated by cultural geographers, one that entails critical thinking and develops with experience (Lewis 1999). The distinctive qualities of the American religious landscape can easily be overlooked by the average person who has little training in observing its uniqueness, unlike a professional geographer who reads the landscape with analytical rigor. For example, a notable aspect of the spatiality of religion in America is the vast number of churches on the landscape and their random location. A unique religious marketplace has been established in America. One can effectively predict where a McDonald's or Wal-Mart will be successful on the landscape, but there are few outside factors that negate the construction of a church in any location on the American landscape (Zelinsky 2001). Religion is visible in many other forms besides churches in America: billboards promoting the moral ramifications of adultery, contemporary Christian music heard in many radio station markets, and religious debates on abortion and gay rights that sometimes fill our government buildings with protestors and supporters. There are also many non-Christian

religions that have impacted the American landscape and are increasingly prevalent in today's society because of new technologies, information exchange, and people's increasing openness to new ideas. Hindu temples and Islamic mosques are examples of the multicultural religious landscape developing in America.

These are common examples of religious displays on the American landscape. Another example is the production of a roadside memorial or a *descanso* commemorating a person's death on a highway. Many of these memorials have a religious component to their construction by including symbols or statues of religious characters or events and a significant ritual component that commemorates passage between life and death, a central element of religion. Roadside shrines and religious icons are common in other countries such as Italy, Poland, and Thailand; however, these icons do not necessarily memorialize the death of a loved one (Zelinsky 2001). By studying the spatial distribution of these icons and their symbolic elements, geoscientists can add to the expanding knowledge of the impact of religion upon culture.

Context and Purpose

Cultural geographers often refer to the landscape as a functioning palimpsest that displays the sum of all erasures and continual overwritings of culture upon the landscape (Crang 1998a). Included are the physical, cultural, social, and environmental landscapes. Humans have a tendency to alter these landscapes as primary motivation for creating and maintaining places to live, work, and play. A core concern for many geographers is to understand the spatial alterations on the landscape by humans or "Why here and not over there?" For example, economic geographers are especially concerned with understanding why some businesses locate in one location and not another.

A similar approach can be applied to many aspects of the human built environment, whether in urban or rural areas. Roadside memorials can be thought of as icons on the urban and rural landscapes. These memorials hold special meanings for their constructors. Today, many people think of icons as pictures one double-clicks to activate programs on a computer, but they have been used for centuries by people to convey a message. Christianity has been a constant producer of icons, particularly in the Catholic church. The cross is often used by many Christians to explain the story of Jesus Christ's death for the world's sins, so the production of icons is not a new practice for Christianity.

The death of a loved one also generates these icons. Many Americans commemorate loved ones in cemeteries with a headstone containing the person's name, birth date, and death date. Religious drawings or other depictions can be found on the headstone, or it may be shaped into a cross. Flowers are often used to commemorate the grave as well (Walter 1996). Americans have a tendency to acknowledge grief in different forms, and one of these forms is erecting memorials at the site of death. Tragic, nationally publicized events such as the Oklahoma City bombing and Columbine High School shootings have been memorialized with artifacts and icons symbolizing the loss of a loved one. Entire places such as the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC, have been erected to remember individuals or groups of people and their deaths. Everyday, people leave flowers, pictures, letters, or other mementos at the memorial to help with the grieving process. In the instances of Oklahoma City, Columbine, and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, an organization documents the items left and stores them in a warehouse for historians to examine (Doss 2002, Everett 2002). These large-scale

examples garner significant media coverage, but on a smaller scale, memorial iconography is scattered along the world's landscape conveying a message. Roadside memorials at fatal crash locations are a significant microscale example that have not been adequately studied as to context and meaning.

One difference in the construction of roadside memorials from other commemorative practices on the landscape is that they often reside on state-maintained rights-of-way. Because this placement blurs the distinction between church and state, a roadside memorial occasionally preludes controversy. There is also extensive variation among states in policies that address memorial construction along highways. In the May 1998 issue of *American City & County*, Chris Ross (p 50) describes, "...in probably no other area of public life does public practice diverge so dramatically from official policy." In some jurisdictions, even homemade garage sale and political campaign signs are more heavily regulated and scrutinized by planning and zoning officials than roadside memorials. These signs are often allowed on the right-of-way but are required to be a certain distance from the road and cannot be nailed to telephone poles. One state, West Virginia, has a program with information online that allows the personal construction of roadside memorials on state rights-of-way. Application forms for permits to construct a memorial are also available online (*West Virginia Department of Transportation* 2003). Other states have offered alternative programs to discourage the erection of personal memorials. The Alaska Department of Transportation places its own cenotaphic signs along highway rights-of-way. These signs are printed on a blue background and titled "Please Drive Safely," followed by "In Memory Of" and the victim's name (*Anchorage Daily News* 2002). Virginia is also implementing a similar program that started on July

1, 2003 (*Virginia Department of Transportation* 2003). Finally, other states such as Wyoming and Oregon have been addressing the controversy in their legislatures (*Wyoming Department of Transportation* 2003; *Detroit News* 2000). Despite being outlawed in some states, roadside memorials are still erected in remembrance of some tragic roadside events. These memorials are often left untouched by transportation officials because they are respected as sacred places even though they violate law. Legislation addressing the debate of roadside memorial construction will likely continue.

To demonstrate the influence these memorials have on society, especially in Southern culture, one can examine country music. Hank Williams, Jr. (2002) describes the two crosses he is symbolically setting in his song “Cross on the Highway” for his friends that died in a sudden automobile crash. Williams describes in the album cover:

I’ve noticed in my travels, small crosses on the side of interstates and in the curves of backcountry roads. I always wondered who dies there and how did it happen. Not until my close friends, Derrick Thomas and Mike Tellis, met their tragic deaths, the results of a sudden ice storm in Kansas City, did I know the real meaning and significance of those little white crosses.

Another song by country singer Randy Travis, “Three Wooden Crosses” (2003), uses the memorials to describe God’s mysterious plans. A preacher tells of an automobile crash in which only one person, a prostitute, survives. Three wooden crosses are constructed for those that die in the crash. No one understands why God spares the immoral woman, but because of this tragic event, the woman turns to Christianity. In the song’s conclusion, the listener is told that the former hooker is the preacher’s mother.

Photographers have also touched on the significance of these memorials in people’s lives. Bill Sampson’s (2002a) exhibit “Hallowed Ground: A Photographic Documentary” places black and white photographs of roadside memorials with written descriptions of the person’s life or the tragic event inside cross-shaped frames. Through

his interaction with families in this project, an informal support group was established to help each of the families cope with their grief. Through the commonality of creating a roadside memorial, the project has brought people together to share the hurt of losing a loved one.

Roadside memorials are a significant component of the cultural landscape. Additional research into this symbolic landscape will contribute to understanding religion's influence on American culture and how this landscape is produced through emotional grieving process.

Defining a Symbolic Landscape

The New Merriam-Webster Dictionary (1989, 726) defines a symbol as “something that stands for something else; especially something concrete that represents or suggests another thing that cannot in itself be pictured.” Symbols are present across the world's landscape. Many people in the Western world think of the Statue of Liberty as a symbol of freedom and democracy. Symbols aid in manipulating and accessing abstract concepts by demanding attention and stimulating thought (Dawes 1988). So what exactly is a symbolic landscape? It is a landscape that is invested with the meanings and beliefs of the society in which it is located. These landscapes act as text to illustrate the artifacts, beliefs, and technologies of that time. Often, they are not static, but constantly change according to the values and meanings one is trying to convey.

A recent example of a changing symbolic landscape that carries persistent meaning is the site of the World Trade Center towers in New York City. These two towers once stood as symbols of the prosperous Western world. Standing high above any other structure in New York, they symbolized the heart of the world's economic trading

center. In one day, these towers collapsed; thousands died; and a symbolic graveyard was instantly established that will endure. All of the redevelopment plans for the site featured symbolic designs to commemorate the lives lost at the site, but they also included elements to reestablish the location as a cultural and world icon. The chosen plan by Daniel Libeskind has two buildings with a vertical garden flowing through a spire that is 1,776 feet high (1776 was also the country's birth year). The original footprint of the towers will remain intact for a cultural park that will show the foundation walls of the original towers that hold back the Hudson River. A wedge of light will cast upon Ground Zero every year on September 11th at the precise time when the first airplane struck one of the towers (Herman 2003; *Lower Manhattan Development Corporation* 2003). The redevelopment plans for the World Trade Center site include many symbolic elements of patriotism, commemoration, and cultural awareness. This redevelopment is an example of this idea that landscapes are a palimpsest by making the location structurally different but retaining some of the original structures and functions of the World Trade Center.

Other symbolic landscapes include memorials commemorating a successful event, house styles, which can symbolize ethnic solidarity, commercial symbolism such as McDonald's "golden arches," which represent a brand of fast-food, and skyscrapers, which, for example, symbolize insurance companies' commitment to communities. Each of these landscapes, whether created as a symbol intentionally or unintentionally, conveys a meaning to society.

History of the *Descanso*

The rapid diffusion of roadside memorials or descansos can be attributed to the quickly built landscape of the American road system in the early 20th century. In

Spanish, the term “descanso” literally means “to rest” and was used to mark the location where pallbearers temporarily set a coffin down when traveling on foot to a cemetery. Migrants traveling the paths would often stop and pray at descansos. Americans quickly adopted this practice in the southwest to honor loved ones killed in crashes along the expanding American highway system (Ball 2003; Everett 2002; Sampson 2002b; Reid and Reid 2001). Construction of roadside memorials has diffused throughout much of the country and the world (Everett 2000). Checking various hobbyist websites online that document these memorials, many of those describing the memorials in the southwest still refer to them as descansos (Panlilio 2003; Whiting 2003; *Soul Food Café* 2002). There is even an Irish website that claims it has documented over 450 “permanent” roadside memorials constructed out of limestone or some other rock material that is often used for headstones in cemeteries (*Irish Roadside Memorials at Sites of Traffic Fatalities* 2002).

Rapid construction of an extensive American roadway system has been a primary contributor to the diffusion of the descanso. Raitz (1999) describes the significant influence that such a planning and building program has had on American society. The road has created a new sense of place in America, one that is common, but the land around it is often undisciplined. Modern interstates have shortened two-day trips by stagecoaches into two-hour drives by cars, so places that were once untraveled are now easily accessible by many Americans (Sheller and Urry 2000). The American road has transformed these places. Without this transportation network and flow and opportunity for speed of people, many of the roadside memorials would not exist.

Research Questions and Hypothesis

Laws allowing or banning crosses along highways are obviously controversial,

and it appears that no clear-cut policy will be established by the states or the federal government in the near future. If the federal government addressed this issue, there would likely be a stifling of this religious display in American society. How can this issue be addressed on a more localized level within city and county governments? In what ways are urban areas impacted by these memorial practices? How do citizens in smaller urban areas in the Bible Belt view these memorials? This research will examine roadside memorials in Warren County, Kentucky. Located in the Bible Belt, Warren County is about 115 miles south of Louisville, Kentucky, and approximately 65 miles north of Nashville, Tennessee, the hub of the Bible Belt (Figure 1-1). Bowling Green, the largest city in the county, has a population slightly less than 50,000 people. The religious landscape in Warren County is dominated by Protestant churches located in the city and throughout the rural areas of the county. Signs or marquees much like Zelinsky (2001) describes denouncing controversial topics such as abortion are prominently erected in front yards by some churches. Warren County is a suitable study area because of the prominence of its religious landscape.

This research examines memorials set up by family members and loved ones of deceased individuals at fatal crash locations within the county. I hypothesize that crosses are located throughout the rural areas and Bowling Green's urbanized area alike. I expect to find a significant number of roadside memorials in Warren County, since 19 people were killed in 2001 along mainly rural, two-lane highways in the county (Kentucky Transportation Center 2002); however, I hypothesize that most of these makeshift memorials have been erected in non-urban areas of the county since the state of Kentucky has identified that the bulk of traffic fatalities throughout the state occur on rural, two-

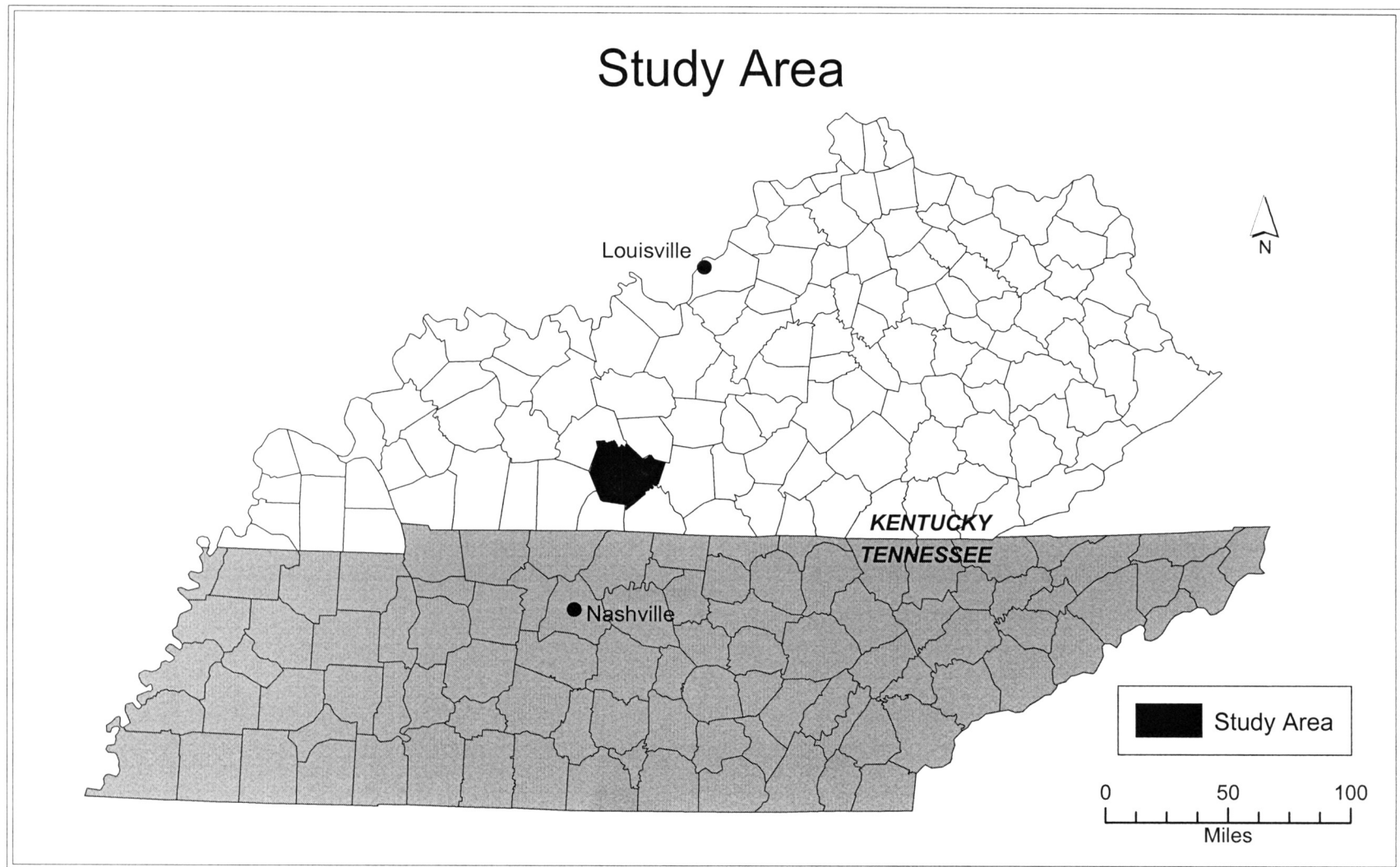


Figure 1-1: The study area of Warren County is located about 120 miles south of Louisville, Kentucky and 60 miles north of Nashville, Tennessee.

lane highways. If this locational hypothesis is borne out, it might suggest that the issue of roadside memorials is more appropriately dealt with by local governments than federal officials. I also expect that these memorials are composed of religious iconography relevant to Protestantism, such as a cross or Bible, because of the influence of Protestant religions on the culture within Warren County. Studying these memorials provides another insight into the religious landscape of the Bible Belt, fills a void in the geoscience literature that only examines larger metropolitan areas, and contributes to existing research that examines personal memorials and sacred places on the landscape.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Like many geoscience issues, roadside memorials can be examined from an interdisciplinary perspective. Copious research details aspects of this issue in folklore, geoscience, psychology, and sociology; however, very little research focuses on roadside memorials and their spatial distribution.

Five categories of literature are relevant to this study. Each category contributes to an understanding of roadside memorials but lacks significant contributions to examine fully this persistent cultural practice on the landscape. This research ties all this information together to fill these gaps in scientific inquiry.

Geography of Religion

Previous geoscience research has studied different aspects of religion's influence on the landscape, from immigrants establishing their religions in a foreign location (Ebaugh et al. 2000; Numrich 1997) to Roman Catholic yard shrines on Italian-Americans' lawns (Manzo 1983). Unfortunately, the geography of religion has been neglected until recently (Peach 2002).

Religion is a relatively new realm of research for social geographers in the 21st century. Much of the research in the 1990s dealt with the ideas of identity and community within the realm of religion (Kong 2001); however, as the 21st century begins, geoscientists are initiating the study of sacred places (Tillman and Emmett 1999; Chamberlain 2001), especially sacred places in respect to non-Christian religions (Gesler and Pierce 2000; Numrich 2000, 1997). Both identity and sacred space are important issues in understanding religion's influence on society and the landscape, but the

American religious landscape. Zelinsky (1961) undertook an extensive effort over 40 years ago to map the geographies of Protestants, Catholics, Christian Scientists, and other religious denominations in the United States. Meinig (1965) examined Mormon culture and its diffusion. Unfortunately, research in this area of geography is limited because there has never been a full and accurate census of religion and religious preferences in the United States (Zelinsky 2001). Examining different elements in society, such as roadside memorials, will offer insight on religion's significance in American culture. This type of research can expand the knowledge base of human-environment interactions in America because mapping these geographies is an important method in revealing the process and form of the landscape (Mitchell 2002; Zelinsky 2001; Kong 2001).

Cultural geographers have recently drawn attention to geographical research addressing religion because there have been relatively few theories developed in this subject matter (Kong 2001). This trend is changing with new theories now being developed to understand religion's impact upon culture and geography. Many geoscientists have concluded that although there has been a rise in scientific thought, religion remains a strong influence upon popular culture, and this impact is shown on the landscape with temples, megachurches, yard shrines, cemeteries, or roadside memorials (Zelinsky 2001, 1994; Bhardwaj and Rao 1998; Manzo 1983; Weightman 1993).

Symbolic Landscapes

The examination of symbolic landscapes was acknowledged as an accepted practice with Jackson and Smith's (1984) research in the mid-1980s. During this time a paradigm shift from the Berkeley school to the new school of cultural geography

occurred. This new school focused more on meanings, cultural identities, symbolic landscapes, and their changes (Crang 1998a).

The subfield of cultural geography has produced a significant volume of research about the world's symbolic landscapes. Much of this research, like most of geography, is interdisciplinary and often published in non-geographic journals. Memorial landscapes containing monuments dedicated to a tragic event have been a particular focus of recent symbolism research in urban areas. This type of symbolic landscape is likely the most common and most noticeable for the average person. Dwyer (2002) discusses the importance of civil rights memorials in the South in terms of racial politics and documenting the cultural history. Similarly, war memorials carry significant symbolic meaning, either showing remembrance for a tragic event, protest of a war, or as a tool to promote future peace because of war (Gough 2000).

Other memorials dot the landscape to honor "less significant" events or people. These memorials honor the everyday person killed while performing normal functions of life. These memorials have been erected for highly publicized events such as the Oklahoma City bombing and the Columbine High School shootings. Research tends to focus on how those left behind after a loved one's death deal with grief. It is often displayed on the landscape through memorials of flowers, stuffed animals, crosses, candles, and anything else one views as being a significant token to honor the deceased. Oftentimes, these memorials act as temporary shrines to the dead, and scholars are dissecting the displays to better understand the culture of grief, memorials, and symbolism by documenting the items left and storing them in warehouses (Doss 2002). Although not predominantly urban as the foregoing examples are, roadside memorials are

another important symbolic landscape. Reid and Reid (2001) and folklorist Everett (2000) have extensively researched roadside shrines in Texas. Another study done by Zimmerman (1995) examined southcentral Kentucky and formulated through interviews a deeper insight into the cultural practice of constructing roadside memorials through interviews with their builders. Although most of these studies have not been explicitly spatial, the memorials impact the landscape and have a significant geographic component that needs to be examined.

Religious geography focusing on the ideas of identity and community is filling voids in symbolic geographic research (Kong 2001; Peach 2002). Studies focusing on religious migrants help demonstrate the retention of identity for many in their own homeland and abroad because of symbolic meanings attached to objects such as Islamic mosques or Hindu temples (Shahshahani 1998; Bhardwaj and Rao 1998). Even the symbolic significance of natural objects such as mountains is examined by Blake (1998) to understand what physical features convey to people and contribute to community identity.

The study of symbolic landscapes can be approached from various methodologies, such as visual observation, symbolic analyses, hermeneutics, and phenomenology. All of these methods are valid, but lend different insights to human interaction on the landscape and calls upon the expertise of the viewer. Meinig (1979) discusses the many different possible personal interpretations of the same scene. One may examine a photograph with children playing in the sand on a beach and describe the children's joy of creating a sand sculpture, while another individual may notice a look of disgust on one child's face and talk about the picture conveying a sense of not feeling

included as a child. The same picture is shown, but because of different backgrounds and experiences, a different picture is described by each individual. Symbolic analysis deepens our understanding and appreciation of these world cultures that shape all individuals.

Sacred Place

Sometimes locations hold a special meaning to people, as if the places are sacred. The term sacred place is used to define a place on the earth's surface that is revered for some reason, which may include religious purposes, such as it is believed to be the first location where a sermon was given or the location of a fatal car crash. These places hold certain ties to beliefs and meanings to some people, thereby making the location special or holy. Richardson (1984, 2003) has examined the meaning and evolution of sacred place in African society and in the American South.

Deathscapes

Recent research has focused on deathscapes and practices memorializing the dead. Literature describing the transition from coffin burials to high-rise buildings for crematory remains in Hong Kong is just one example of the broad range of funereal and memorial practices being studied (Teather 1999). Much of this deathscape research concentrates on other countries with little focus on the United States; however, significant research being produced on commemoration practices of Americans, especially in high profile deaths and public memorial spaces, has gained the attention of several folklorists (Doss 2002; Dwyer 2002; Everett 2002).

Urban and Rural Geographic Studies

Urban areas, particularly Chicago (Numrich 2000, 1997; Tillman and Emmett

1999) and Los Angeles (Weightman 1993), have been a particular focus for some geoscientists, while research in rural areas has been limited, especially true in geographic fields such as planning and transportation. Much of this research has its foundation in Edward Ullman's (1941) theories developed at the University of Chicago, so it is only appropriate that significant planning research focuses on that large metropolitan area. Unfortunately, this spatial bias spreads into other geoscience research, which also concentrates on larger urban areas. Most of American society resides in these urban areas, but there are many smaller settlements that need research to develop policies and practices tailored to their size.

Examination of the literature indicates a heavy emphasis on research in major urban areas. With the exception of studies of roadside memorials, house types, and physical features, much symbolic landscape research is inherently urban because of the nature of its human-made production. What about relatively small cities, meaning those with a population under one hundred thousand, and their hinterlands? A small urban area's symbolism could tell scientists large amounts about society and culture, thereby providing a significant amount of qualitative data.

Taxonomies as a Research Tool

Developing a taxonomy or typology is a useful tool for cultural geographers. Classification scheme development is probably more prevalent in physical and regional geography. For example, physical features are often classified by their elevation into mountains, hills, plains, and valleys. Unlike many geographers, biologists and botanists have been developing taxonomies for centuries as an essential reference tool. A common biologic taxonomy is the study of the classification of all living organisms. The origins

of taxonomy development date back to just “harmful” and “nonharmful” organisms. In the 300s BC, Aristotle used this system to divide organisms into those that were red blooded and those that were not red blooded. This system in biology lasted over 2,000 years until further evolutionary studies were extrapolated (Cummins 2002; Horn et al. 1997). Botanists have developed the International Plant Names Index (1999), which is a database of names associated with basic bibliographical details of all seed plants to help botanists understand their characteristics. Other fields are developing taxonomies as well. Educational institutions have developed taxonomies to categorize test questions (University of Victoria 2002), and researchers have developed taxonomies of cultural studies (van de Vijver and Leung 2001). Businesses have even adopted taxonomies to help with filing matters and to organize management decisions (Bruno and Richmond 2003). Researchers of cyber terrorism are also requesting that scientists develop taxonomies of cyber terror to aid in their new concerns (Debrix 2001). As humans, we naturally classify events, features, and ideas in our culture as a way to understand society and to process its intricate nature. This research will be using a similar methodology of creating a typology of roadside memorials to develop an understanding the memorials’ symbolism.

This research pulls together these various themes that are important to understanding the roadside memorial landscape. The previous research undertaken by many different scientists provides a basis and understanding for pursuing an analysis of the cultural practice of building roadside memorials.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This chapter outlines the methods utilized to examine the spatial distribution of a cultural practice. A four-step process was used:

1. Review related literature and current issues.
2. Develop a database of existing roadside memorials.
3. Conduct interviews on the research topic.
4. Analyze the database and qualitative information.

Step 1: Review Related Literature and Current Issues

Step one was to review the related literature in various fields and subfields of the geosciences. Literature was examined to develop a scientific comprehension of religion, death and dying, and sacred place. In addition, research methods were also analyzed during this process to determine the best approach to address this research topic. Prior work on roadside memorials was also sought. Studies in folklore cover the issue extensively in terms of the cultural importance and reasons for memorial construction; however, very few studies have an explicit spatial component. Hardly any geoscience research can be found examining this cultural practice over space.

Additionally, all state Departments of Transportation (DOTs) were contacted by email to obtain their policies on roadside memorial construction. The DOTs were asked about their formal policies, any alternate memorial programs, and any other specific information on roadside memorials in their state. This technique was an effective approach in learning about the legality of the cultural practice. Like many other state policies, such as the legal extent of gambling in a state, roadside memorial construction is addressed in various ways in some states and not at all in others. Because of the regional variation in roadside memorial policies, roadside memorial construction is not addressed

in a uniform manner throughout the United States.

Since religious symbols are often primary elements of these memorials, an understanding of the religious composition of the region is necessary. By comparing the proportion of church attendees by denomination in the region to the total proportions of attendees on a county, regional, and state level, the uniqueness or similarity of the region can be explained with possible consequences for prevalence of roadside memorial construction. Religious census information was obtained from the Glenmary Institute (Jones et al. 2002).

Step 2: Develop a Database of Existing Roadside Memorials

A database of existing roadside memorials in Warren County had to be developed. All roads in the county, including federal, state, and local roads, were driven to assemble the most accurate possible database of roadside memorials in the study area. A systematic approach was taken while driving the roads, because this portion of Kentucky is changing with urbanization extending well beyond the city limits and into various portions of the county. Since roads are continuously being constructed in the study area, a recent map was obtained from the Barren River Area Development District, which conducts the region's road centerline mapping program for the Commonwealth of Kentucky. With this map, major arterials were driven, along with minor roadways feeding into those arterials, until a survey of the county was completed. All the roads outside of an "urban loop" that surround Bowling Green were driven first. Next, the roads, which mainly consisted of local streets, were driven within the urban loop to finish the data collection process of this research.

When a memorial was found, the absolute location was recorded using a GPS

unit, and a digital camera was used to photograph the memorial and roadway from varying angles. The pictures capture the specific elements and site characteristics around the memorial. A log book was also utilized to write down any specific information that needed to be recorded such as names on the memorial, elemental components, and site descriptions. Each memorial was assigned a number and the appropriate pictures and information corresponded to that number. A computerized database table was developed with each memorial having specific attributes to be analyzed. A shortened version of the roadside memorial database is found in Appendix 1.

Step 3: Conduct Interviews on the Research Topic

Another step was initiated to grasp local motivations for building roadside memorials. An advertisement was placed in the *Country Peddler* (2003), which is a weekly publication containing various classified ads. The *Peddler* is free and is often included in Warren County residents' newspapers. Research subjects were asked to contact me to participate in this study if they had set up a roadside memorial in the county and were willing to be interviewed (Figure 3-1). Not enough individuals volunteered for this study, so a detailed qualitative foundation in examining the importance of this cultural practice to memorial constructors cannot be developed; however, the information that was gathered provides some insight into individual's perceptions of roadside memorials and their construction.

Step 4: Analyze the Database and Qualitative Information

This process began once the database information was compiled. To explore the structure and meaning of roadside memorials, a typology of roadside memorials based on their elemental symbols was developed from this database. Each memorial was analyzed

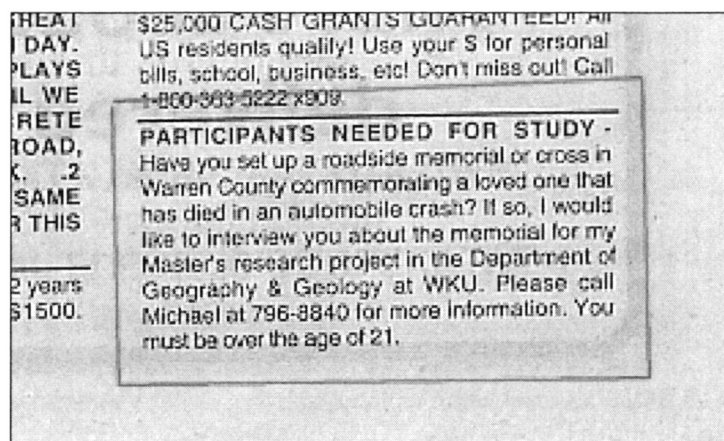


Figure 3-1: Classified advertisement.

Source: *Country Peddler*, October 30, 2003, Vol. 33 (9): 27.

according to the elements and perceived meanings found in them. The classification that had the largest number of elements became the memorial's type. For example, a memorial having three elements of a floral memorial of passage, but only one element of a reminiscent memorial of life was considered to be a floral memorial of passage. This process simplified the analysis of the specific elements.

This typology also generated the basic information needed to conduct a two-sample difference of proportions test on the database. Inferences can be made about two population proportions by comparing the difference of two sample proportions. A dichotomous variable that has only two possible outcomes is appropriate for this test (McGrew and Monroe 2000). For the purposes of this research, the memorials were analyzed according to the Bowling Green urban area boundary. Those within the boundary were classified as urban memorials and those outside the boundary were labeled as rural memorials. The typology was also utilized to divide the urban and rural memorials by memorials of death and memorials of life. Essentially, proportions were generated for use in the two-sample difference of proportions test. The null hypothesis is that there is no difference in elemental symbols or typology between memorials

constructed in an urban area than those in a rural area ($H_0: \rho_1 = \rho_2$). The alternate hypothesis is that there is a difference ($H_A: \rho_1 > \rho_2$ or $H_A: \rho_1 < \rho_2$). This statistical test is conducted on a small sample size, so its limitations are discussed later in this thesis.

The memorials were also analyzed by mapping their locations and studying the spatial distribution of various attributes of the memorials. Maps were generated depicting the memorials by the jurisdictional maintenance of the highway rights-of-way, the number of lanes of the roadways, and the average number of vehicles that pass the memorials each day.

The information gathered from interviews, and other qualitative information, was compared to a study done by Zimmerman (1995) to understand the current issues relating to this topic and changing perspectives on this issue over the past nine years. This type of analysis enhances the understanding of why this issue is such a complex one and the importance this issue has to society and culture.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS & RESULTS

Roadside Memorial Policies

Roadside memorial construction is seen in many areas of the United States; however, there are few policies that address the practice. There are varying degrees of government control over this issue. The federal government has not made a policy guiding this issue, nor has any guidance or formal statement been issued. Decisions on roadside memorials are often left to the states. Sometimes these decisions are documented with policies, and other times there are no policies, causing state transportation districts to be the ultimate decision makers.

Figure 4-1 depicts the policies, or lack of policies, addressing roadside memorials in each state. These data were acquired from an email survey of the state DOTs conducted in October 2003. These policies can be divided into four categories. It is noteworthy that some states allow the construction of a roadside memorial, and some even encourage the practice. In West Virginia, such memorials are allowed, and they are promoted on the West Virginia Department of Transportation website. Someone wishing to construct a memorial can download a form similar to a permit informing the DOT of the intent to erect a memorial and he or she understands that the DOT may remove the memorial at any time citing safety or maintenance reasons. In the event of a removal, the DOT will attempt to contact the memorial constructor, so he or she may retrieve the memorial and its contents.

On the other hand, some states establish policies barring the construction of memorials. North Carolina has passed a policy saying that roadside memorial

Roadside Memorial Policies

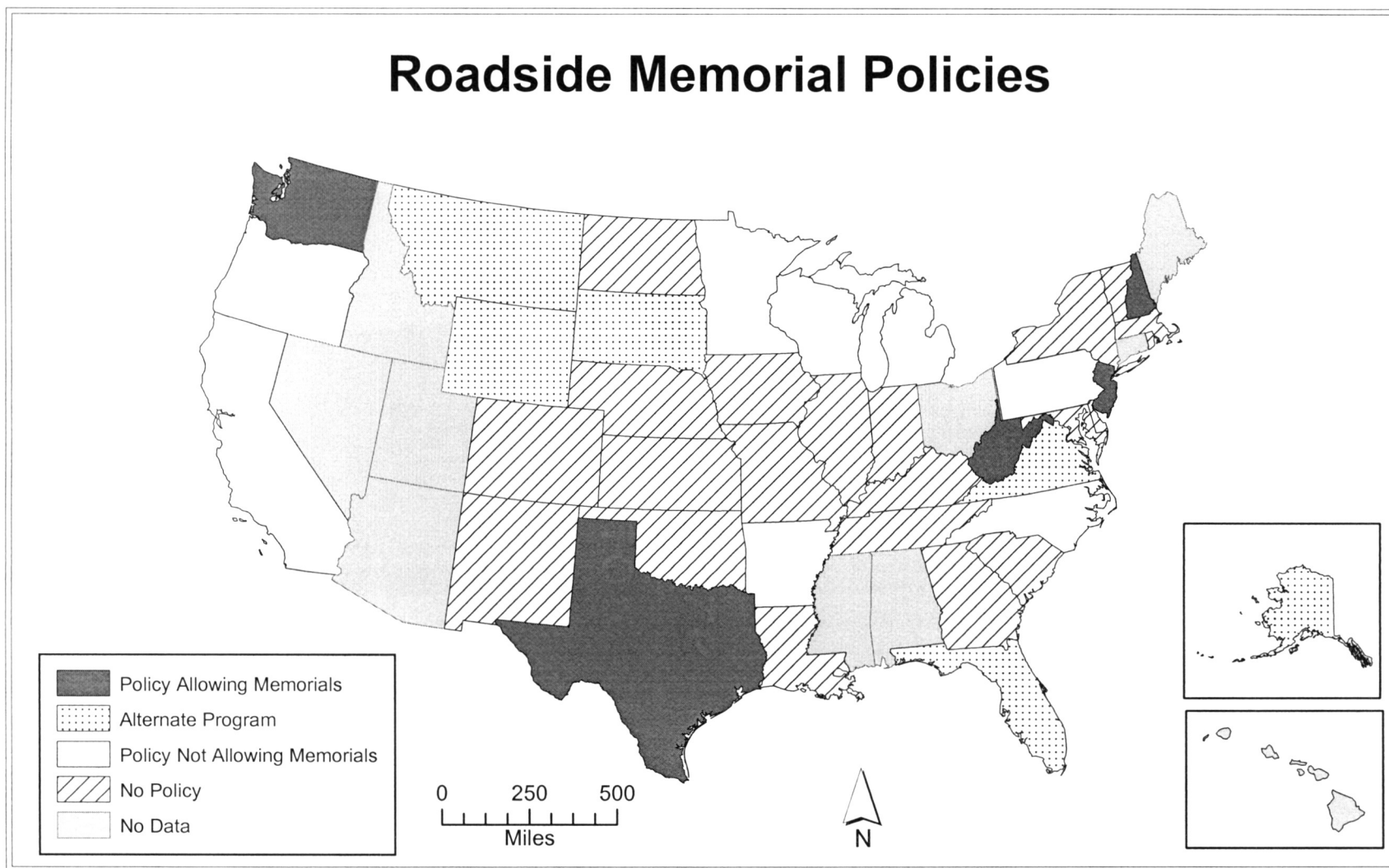


Figure 4-1: Some states have policies addressing roadside memorials, while others have no policy. Appendix 2 describes these policies in more detail.

construction is prohibited. The policy, addressed in the North Carolina General Statutes and the North Carolina Administrative Code, prohibits the “piling of obstructions” and erection of non-regulatory signs. In keeping with the goal of safety, the North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) does not allow the placement of crosses, wreaths, signs, or other items as memorials on highway rights-of-way. This formal policy is disregarded in many cases, as memorials can be seen when driving along Interstate 40 towards Raleigh, North Carolina.

Alternate programs have been created in other states to discourage roadside memorial construction. These programs do not include adopt-a-highway programs or plant-a-tree programs. These alternatives should be regarded as programs in which a uniform marker is placed by the DOT. These standardized memorials are then maintained by the state for some time or indefinitely. Alaska has a memorial program in which three signs are offered for the families of crash victims (Figure 4-2). These signs cost \$500 and are placed on the right-of-way in the approximate area that the wreck occurred. They remain in place for two years before being removed. Virginia also established a similar program that had been scheduled to start in July 2003, but, because of financial constraints, this program has remained dormant pending further budget approval.

It is common for most states, including Kentucky, to have no policy regarding roadside memorials. The Kentucky Transportation Cabinet does not have a Policy and Procedures Manual for the placement of roadside memorials, wreaths, or other objects within the right-of-way limits of a roadway or bridge; however, an informal policy exists whereby a memorial is usually allowed to remain as long as it does not pose a safety




Sign Information		
Select Sign Category:		
<input type="radio"/> In memory of the victim of an accident caused by a drunk driver	<input type="radio"/> Sponsored by the family or friends of a fatally injured drunk driver	<input type="radio"/> In memory of the victim of an accident not caused by a drunk driver
		
Please enter the name as you want it to appear on the plaque: <input type="text"/>		

Figure 4-2: Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities memorial sign options.

Source: Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities webpage (<http://www.dot.state.ak.us/stwddes/dcsrow/assets/pdf/memorialsign.pdf>).

hazard or interfere with right-of-way maintenance. Appendix 2 summarizes the various policies on roadside memorials in each state.

These policies are difficult to develop because roadside memorials are a part of a dynamic landscape. The practice itself changes with each individual memorial. Some are elaborate, almost permanent, structures that are placed with the intent of lasting for many years as a continuing symbol of remembrance. Others are more temporary and disappear after only a few weeks. Additional factors such as removal by local residents or vandalism also impact the temporal aspect of this practice. Developing policies that could potentially address all roadside memorials in a state may be difficult because of the constantly transitioning culture of the practice.

Because of this difficulty in developing policies, 21 states have no formal policy addressing roadside memorials. They are prohibited on rights-of-way in eight states according to formal policy, and five states have a policy allowing the memorials. Another six states provide other methods of remembering a loved one that has died along a highway through standardized memorial sign programs. No trend in developing

roadside memorial policies extends across the country, except for those without a memorial policy. Many of the states in the Great Plains and northern Sunbelt region extending into the Midwest have not addressed this issue with a formal policy. There is a small clustering of larger states in the northern Rocky Mountains and the Great Plains that provides alternate memorial programs. It is interesting to note that many of the states where no data were collected are clustered. Additional follow-up could be performed to obtain their perspectives.

Local Policies and Interest

In Warren County, state laws do not specifically address the issue of roadside memorials. Also, no city or county policies address the issue of roadside memorial construction on state-maintained rights-of-way.

The Kentucky Transportation Cabinet District Three Department of Highways personnel acknowledge the practice of roadside memorial construction as a sensitive topic for many residents, especially those that have lost a loved one along the country's highway system. A recent crash is examined to show that highway personnel are listening to motorists and citizens on this topic.

While conducting this research, a fatal crash occurred along State Highway 234 (Cemetery Road) early one morning. A memorial was placed at the crash location shortly after the wreck, and the picture in Figure 4-3 was taken the day after the crash. A prayer circle consisting of a small memorial service with candles formed later that night on the day of the crash. This crash placed the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet in a unique position because this roadway had recently been reconstructed for safety and capacity reasons. Cemetery Road was once a two-lane, curvy highway plagued with

congestion problems, especially during rush hour periods. To more appropriately suit its surroundings, the highway was reconstructed to five-lanes with sidewalks and a shared use-trail along portions of the roadway. An interchange to Interstate 65 was also constructed about a mile from this crash location, making the highway a new gateway to downtown Bowling Green. Because this individual hit a tree, local residents began to wonder if the tree should have remained in place after the reconstruction. Under normal driving circumstances, the tree would have never been an issue, and sometimes trees are actually planted as part of urban beautification. The Department of Highways contacted the family members after the crash, and the tree at the location was taken down by the Department at the request of the family; however, the memorial remained in place. These actions show that transportation officials are aware of the sensitive nature of this issue, and although these memorials do blur a distinction between church and state, officials know that families need a certain amount of time to grieve an individual loss. Policies establishing a formal process that covers every situation while respecting the feelings of the public will be difficult to institute.

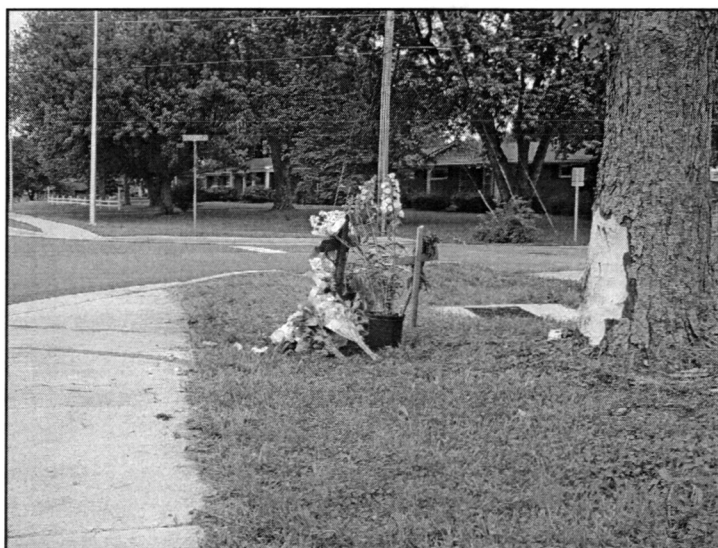


Figure 4-3: Roadside memorial the day after a crash.
Source: Photo by the author.

Regional Religious Composition

Developing knowledge of the religious composition of the region around Warren County, along with understanding the roadside memorials' symbolic elements, helps to pinpoint the probable religious preferences of some memorial constructors. For the purpose of this study, the regional religious composition will be defined as the Barren River Area Development District (BRADD), comprised of Allen, Barren, Butler, Edmonson, Hart, Logan, Metcalfe, Monroe, Simpson, and Warren Counties (Figure 4-4). The Glenmary Research Center (Jones et al. 2002) publishes information on religious congregations and membership in the United States. These data from 2000 detail membership by region, state, and county boundaries for 149 religious bodies. Although some collection problems exist that weaken the accuracy of the data, this compilation is one of only a small number of sources in the United States that depict the religious composition of a county.

It is essential to study religious preferences from a regional perspective for several reasons. First, just because a memorial is located in Warren County does not necessarily mean that its constructors are from the county. Second, Bowling Green is a significant regional retail, business, and industrial center with many out-of-county residents traveling to the urban center for goods, services, and employment. Some of the motorists killed on the county's highways may be from the surrounding regional marketplace. Examining religious congregations from a regional level and comparing them to state data further describes the differences or similarities of the region to the rest of the state.

Figure 4-5 lists the major religious congregations in Kentucky, the BRADD region, and Warren County. The largest proportions of congregations in the state,

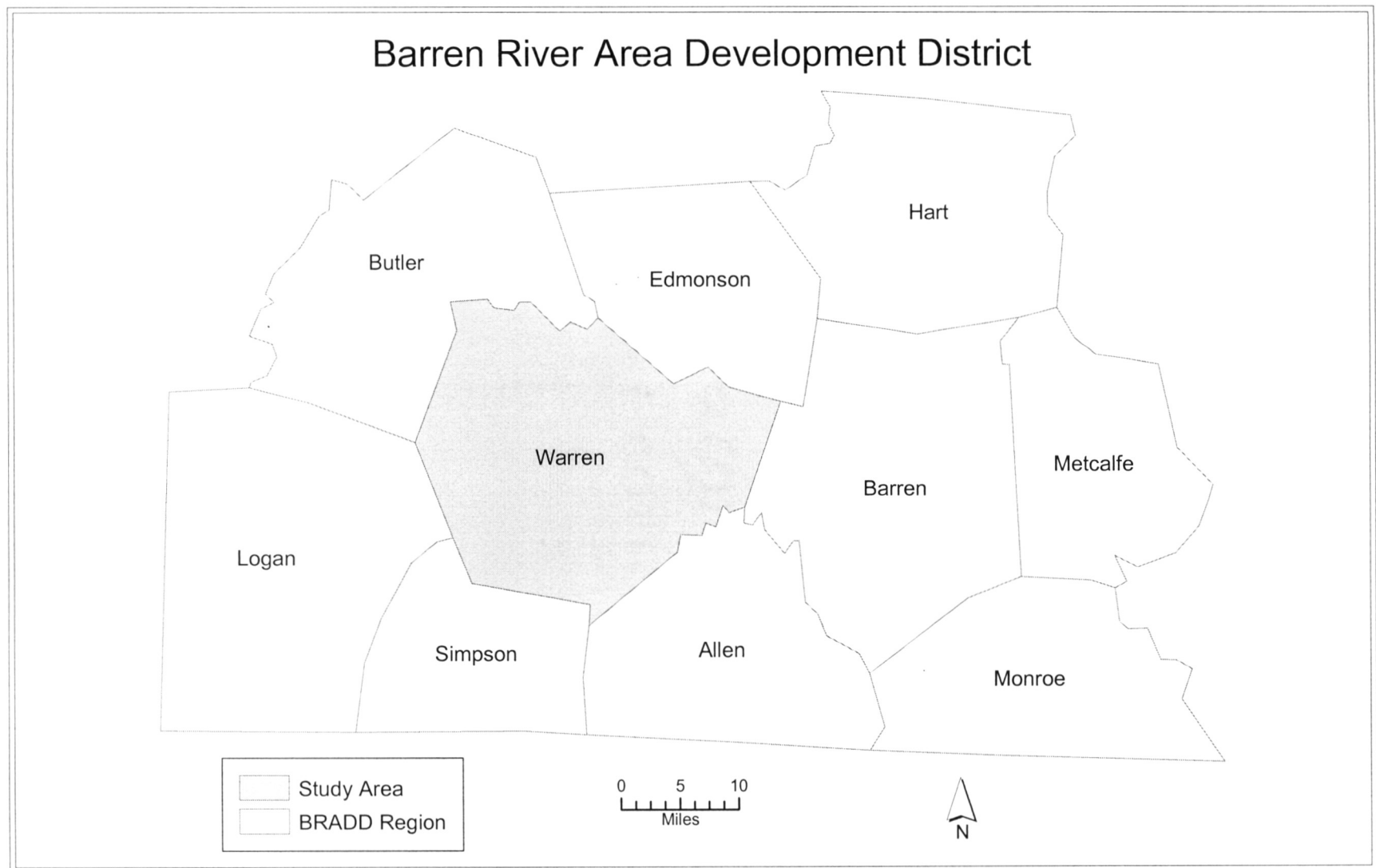


Figure 4-4: Counties included in the regional religious composition.

Major Religious Denominations 2000

Region and Religious Group	Number of Churches	Number of Full Members	Number of Attendees	Total Adherents		
				Number of Adherents	Percent of Total Population	Percent of Total Adherents
Kentucky All Groups	7,143	1,353,901	490,206	2,159,541	53.4	100.0
Catholic	323	NR	NR	406,021	10.0	18.8
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)	231	54,720	17,442	67,611	1.7	3.1
Christian Churches & Churches of Christ	405	86,169	NR	106,638	2.6	4.9
Church of Christ	621	45,571	46,733	58,602	1.4	2.7
"Old" Missionary Baptist Associations	42	7,941	NR	9,735	0.2	0.5
Southern Baptist Convention	2,424	794,040	245,922	979,994	24.2	45.4
United Methodist	991	169,622	69,953	208,720	5.2	9.7
BRADD All Groups	616	101,624	44,577	134,337	52.3	100.0
Catholic	11	NR	NR	5,394	2.1	4.0
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)	7	1,584	651	1,943	0.8	1.4
Christian Churches & Churches of Christ	10	1,131	NR	1,388	0.5	1.0
Churches of Christ	114	8,815	9,583	11,866	4.6	8.8
"Old" Missionary Baptist Associations	31	3,092	NR	7,271	2.8	5.4
Southern Baptist Convention	215	62,608	24,558	76,136	29.6	56.7
United Methodist	99	12,356	6,167	15,234	5.9	11.3
Warren County All Groups	144	35,118	18,516	48,223	52.1	100.0
Catholic	2	NR	NR	3,603	3.9	7.5
Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)	3	800	299	973	1.1	2.0
Christian Churches & Churches of Christ	5	409	NR	498	0.5	1.0
Churches of Christ	24	3,240	3,092	4,032	4.4	8.4
"Old" Missionary Baptist Associations	6	1,327	NR	1,615	1.7	3.3
Southern Baptist Convention	46	21,213	10,860	25,812	27.9	53.5
United Methodist	19	4,471	1,931	5,440	5.9	11.3

Figure 4-5: Major Religious Denominations: 2000.

Source: Glenmary Research Center (Jones et al. 2002) and calculated by the author.

Catholics, Southern Baptists, and United Methodists, are also among the largest denominations in the BRADD region and Warren County. The largest percentage of adherents in the county is Southern Baptists followed by United Methodists. Unlike at the state level, Catholics compose a smaller portion of church attendance in the county and region. These figures support the contention that there is a greater likelihood that those individuals constructing the memorials are Protestant, particularly Southern Baptists. The memorials show significant signs of this particular tie to this religious denomination.

When examining the elements of the memorials in Warren County, the majority consist of crosses, typically white or brown, and wreaths. This is not necessarily unique to a particular Christian denomination; however, in Warren County, there are no statues of saints, crosses depicting the crucifixion, or “JMJ” (which stands for “Jesus, Mary, Joseph”) inscribed on any of the memorials denoting Catholicism. In fact, one memorial simply consisted of a book resembling a Bible with a verse on it. With the knowledge that many Protestant faiths typically emphasize the use of the Bible for religious guidance, while less importance is placed upon tradition and priestly interpretation, one can assume that the memorials are mostly a reflection of Protestant culture. With the religious census information, one can narrow this conclusion to a particular denomination and conclude that the roadside memorials in Warren County are also likely a reflection of the Southern Baptist influence upon this region of Kentucky given the proportions of adherents for the county.

The Spatiality of Roadside Memorials

Developing an understanding of where roadside memorials are located in Warren County can contribute to describing this issue in south-central Kentucky. Memorials can be located in many different environments. They are located on various roadway types maintained either by the state, city, or county, and in heavily urban developments and rural areas. Gaining insight into memorial construction develops additional knowledge of this cultural practice.

Figure 4-6 depicts identified roadside memorial locations in Warren County. In the county, 25 memorials were found. Most of these memorials were located in the central and northern portions of the county, which are characterized by a larger number of vehicles traveling in an urban area and hillier terrain than in the southern half of Warren County. The roadway with the most roadside memorials was U.S. Highway 31-W with six, and five of them were located in its northern traverse through the county. The one intersection with the most memorials is located at State Highway 185 and State Highway 526 with four. Interstate 65 with the highest traffic volumes and highest number of fatal collisions had only one memorial located on its right-of-way. Appendix 1 contains a table with some characteristics of the memorials and their crash dates.

Interviews

Extensive interviews with memorial constructors were not possible; however, several people in the community spoke on the topic. One family with a memorial in their yard was outside as the researcher was performing field work. The memorial consists of a wooden cross and some flowers. According to neighbors, a boy was crossing the street to check the mailbox when he was struck and killed. The boy's family placed the

Roadside Memorials

Warren County, Kentucky
Summer 2003

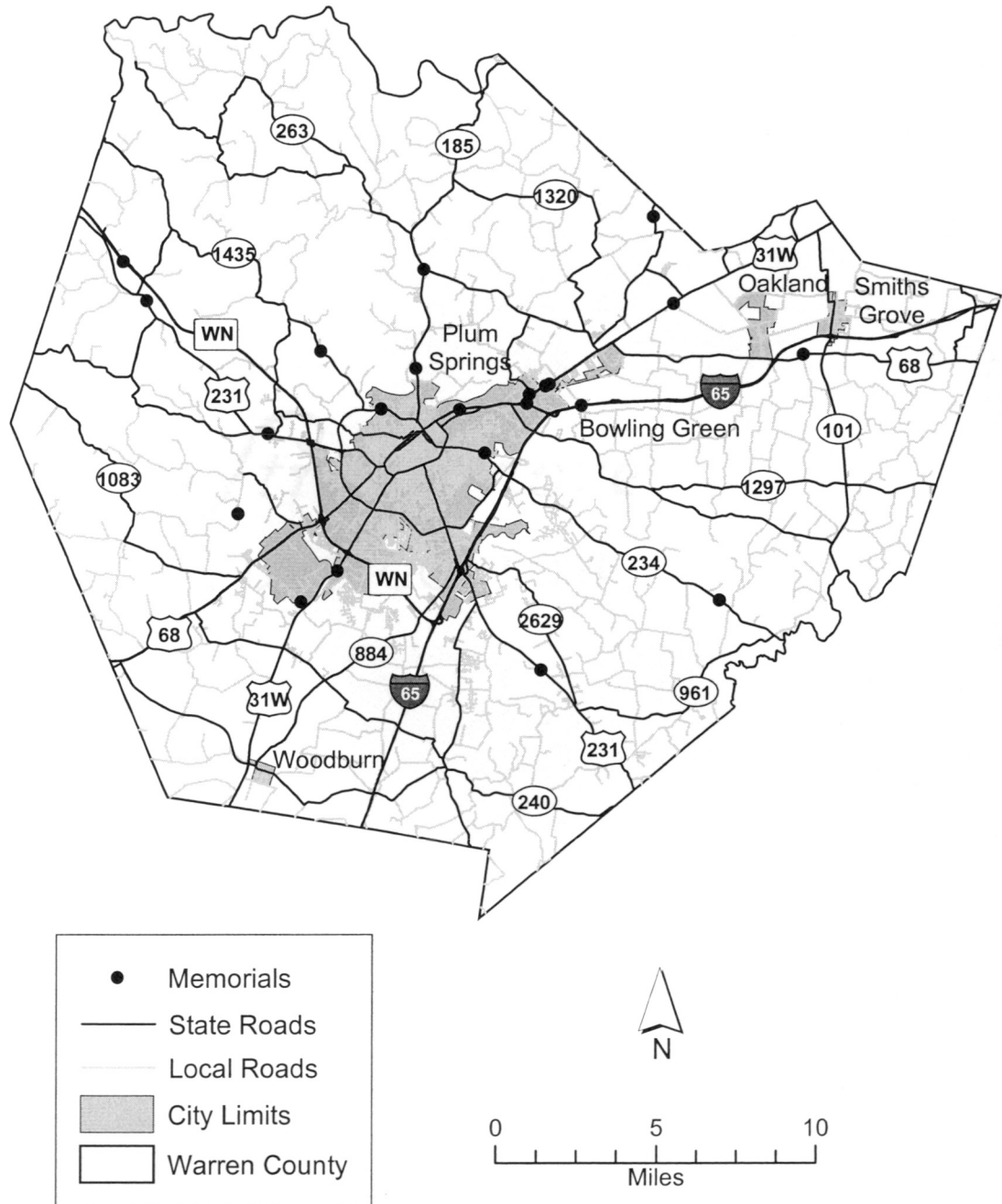


Figure 4-6: Roadside memorial locations in Warren County.

memorial in their yard close to where the crash occurred. Since that time, the family has moved to another portion of Warren County. The current family living in this house allowed the memorial to remain, although it is on the boundary of state maintained right-of-way and their property line. When questioned about why they have never removed the memorial, the mother indicated that she could never do that. It is important to the deceased child's family because they usually will come by on the boy's birthday and update the memorial. She said that if the family did not come by to maintain the site, then she would probably tend to the memorial in their absence. There is a sense of the sacred nature of the memorial's location, even though the individual killed and his family were not known.

Several other people in the community were queried about their perceptions of roadside memorials. Some say they notice them on a regular basis, while others said they pay little attention to them. Most of those interviewed feel that the memorials are sacred to the individuals who construct them, and they feel that they are appropriate given the type of tragedy a family suffers.

This information is important to consider when examining this issue. Roadside memorials along state-maintained roadways can become a controversial topic within the community if people begin to question the use of state property for this function. General conclusions cannot be made from this qualitative information other than it is an important topic with many different opinions and perceptions given a person's cultural background.

Typology

An operational definition of a descanso or roadside memorial needs to be developed. A descanso is any object or artifact that is placed on the earth's surface that

commemorates the death site of an individual. These memorials often signify the site of a fatal automobile crash, but they can also include murders or a natural death along a roadway. Most of the descansos in this study are believed to honor victims of automobile crashes. Memorials include balloons, crosses, flowers, statues, or any element that is placed to commemorate a person's life at the site of their death along a roadway.

The taxonomy is divided into two main categories based upon the act of commemoration, then, several subcategories based on the elements or symbols within the memorial (Figure 4-7). This typology represents only elements found in roadside memorials in Warren County, Kentucky.

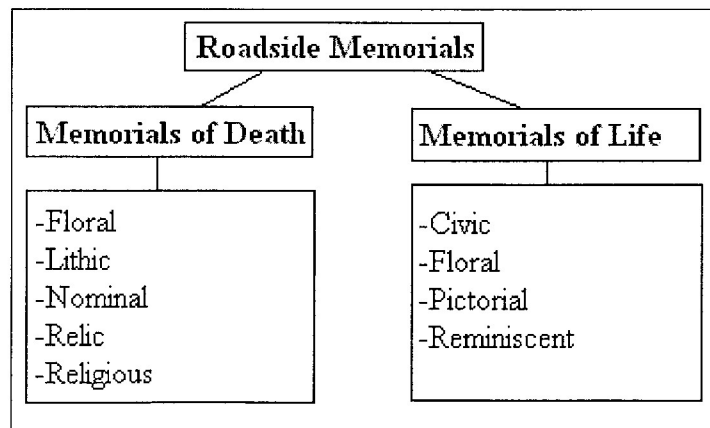


Figure 4-7: Warren County roadside memorial typology.
Source: Created by the author.

Memorials of Death and Memorials of Life

Two categories are used to describe the symbolic meanings of roadside memorials. The first category is memorials of death that commemorate the passing or mode of death of an individual. These memorials typically resemble grave markers seen in cemeteries. Figure 4-8 depicts a memorial of death along U.S. Highway 31-W in Bowling Green. The elements in this memorial resemble funereal flowers and are used to mark the location where someone died in an automobile crash.

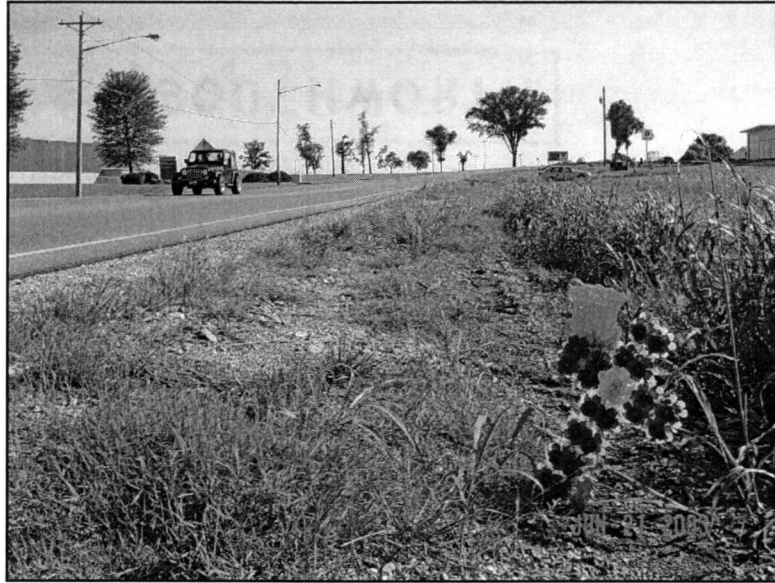


Figure 4-8: Roadside memorial of death on U.S. Highway 31-W.
Source: Photo taken by the author.

The second type of roadside memorial is the memorial of life that commemorates the individual and his or her life. Descansos with pictures, stuffed animals, or other personal mementos are considered memorials of life. An example of this type of descenso in Warren County is shown in Figure 4-9. The grapevine wreath symbolizing the circle of life is an element in this memorial used to celebrate and remember one's life.



Figure 4-9: Roadside memorial of life on State Highway 527.
Source: Photo taken by the author.

Floral Memorials of Death

Floral memorials of death include floral items commonly seen at funerals or cemeteries, which are symbolic elements that commemorate the death of an individual. The types of flowers vary but are typically traditional flowers that are often light or pastel in tone, sometimes seasonal flowers seen in funereal flower arrangements. Balloons, an element of floral memorials of life, are not in this category because they represent happiness and celebration, not something typically solemn like death. Figure 4-10 contains several elements of a floral memorial of death on U.S. Highway 231 west of Bowling Green. The flowers nailed to the tree and surrounding the base of the tree are exemplary of this type of roadside memorial.



Figure 4-10: Floral roadside memorial of death on U.S. Highway 231.
Source: Photo taken by the author.

Lithic Memorials of Death

In cemeteries, stone and rocks are used profusely as markers. These construction materials are used in roadside memorials as well. Figure 4-11 depicts a religious

memorial of passage with a lithic element, two rocks holding up the cross but also marking the establishment of a roadside memorial. Throughout history, graves have been marked by stones outlining the burial site. Stones also represent the earth and one's body becoming "dust to dust." These lithic elements also indicate stability and continuousness because of their use in building materials and construction. These memorials of death give the appearance of an actual grave along the roadside. Although not seen much in south-central Kentucky, headstones are used in some cases as roadside memorials, especially in Ireland (*Irish Roadside Memorials at Sites of Traffic Fatalities* 2002). These grave markers resembling headstones found in American cemeteries are usually made of limestone or some other earthen material and would be considered another type of lithic memorial of death.



Figure 4-11: Roadside memorial of death with a lithic element on State Highway 185.
Source: Photo taken by the author.

Nominal Memorials of Death

Nominal memorials of death include names on a memorial to honor that person's death. The name is often the first name of an individual like the descanso shown in Figure 4-12, but the memorial could include nicknames or full names. Since names are often used on cemetery markers to indicate a burial site or death, descansos with names are memorials of death and not memorials of life.



Figure 4-12: Nominal roadside memorial of death on U.S. Highway 31-W.
Source: Photo taken by the author.

Relic Memorials of Death

Symbols of the automobile crash can be significant components of a descanso. The relic memorial of death depicted in Figures 4-13a and 4-13b has automobile parts scattered along the ground in front of a cross drilled into a rock cut. A rearview mirror and pieces of either the dashboard or the doors have been placed around the area of this memorial. The automobile parts act like artifacts or relics of the death event that occurred at this location.

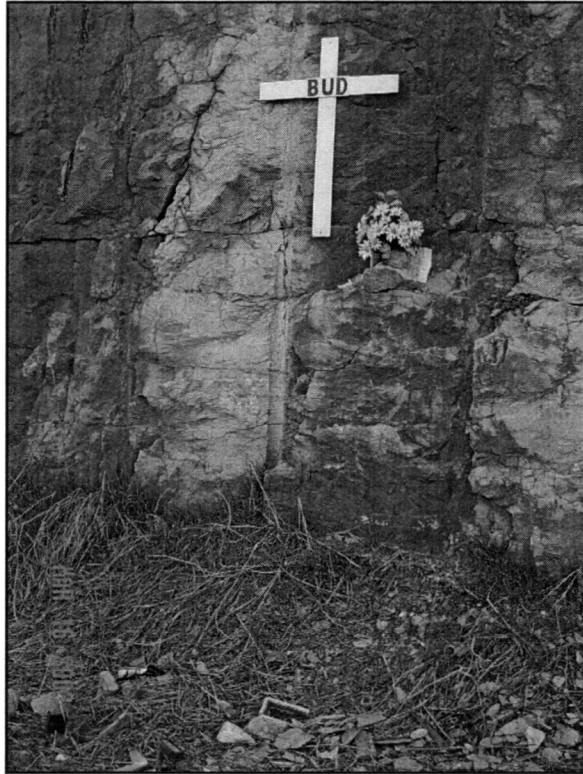


Figure 4-13a: Relic memorial of death on State Highway 185.

Source: Photo taken by the author.



Figure 4-13b: Close-up of relic elements.

Source: Photo taken by the author.

Religious Memorials of Death

Religious memorials of death are probably the most common types of memorials

in America because of the religious significance of the act of dying. Most commonly seen in small white crosses that dot the landscape, religious memorials of death can also include items such as statues or religious books. Figure 4-14 shows an example that people probably conjure in their minds as a common religious roadside memorial of death; however, Figure 4-15 shows a different type of religious memorial outside the study area constructed by local authorities in Georgia. Local officials are now painting white crosses on highways at the site of fatal motor vehicle crashes. This inexpensive program is seen as a way of remembering the dead but also as a safety reminder.

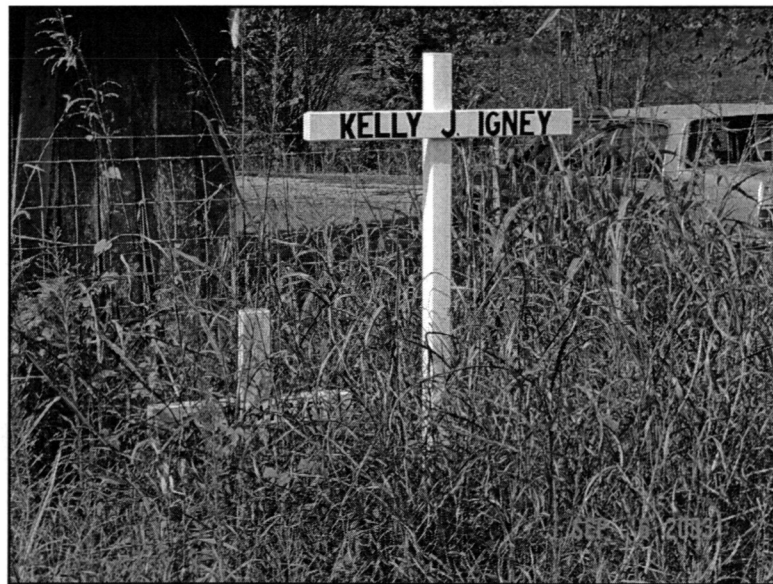


Figure 4-14: Religious roadside memorial of death along Interstate 65.
Source: Photo taken by the author.

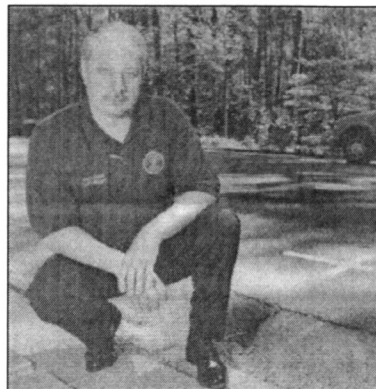


Figure 4-15: A unique religious roadside memorial of death in Augusta, Georgia.
Source: Associated Press photo by Chris Thelen (2003).

Civic Memorials of Life

Civic memorials of life demonstrate some attribute of devotion towards one's country or workplace. The example in Figure 4-16a is included because it is very close to the study area in Allen County and portrays this type of memorial very poignantly. It was not used in any additional analysis besides developing a typology. It has civic elements consisting of an American flag attached to the barbwire fence post next to the memorial. If one also looks closely, a Confederate bandana tied around the right arm of the cross can be seen. These civic symbols of patriotism or Southern heritage have been created by individuals to show one's pride. Another example of a civic memorial of life is depicted in Figure 4-16b. The memorial wreath contains John Deere tractor buttons and was perhaps a company's floral arrangement sent to a funeral home. Although not typically thought of as being civic, this memorial would show one's commitment to the workplace.



Figure 4-16a: Civic roadside memorial of life on State Highway 234 in northwestern Allen County.

Source: Photo taken by the author.



Figure 4-16b: Civic roadside memorial of life on U.S. Highway 231.
Source: Photo taken by the author.

Floral Memorials of Life

Similar to floral memorials of death, floral memorials of life are descansos containing flowers or wreaths. Since flowers are often a sign of life and renewal these items are symbolic of one's living spirit. These flowers are not like those seen in cemeteries, but ones found at celebrations or decorative uses inside homes. The broader symbolism of flowers is to depict rebirth in the spring, with fruits or seeds indicating the continuing cycle of life. Balloons, unlike the floral memorials of death, are in this category because they are usually associated with celebratory events. Figure 4-17 shows a floral memorial of life consisting of only a wreath and a couple of pictures.

Pictorial Memorials of Life

Photographs are another element commemorating life. Although not easily seen by a motorist passing a memorial at 55 mph, they are often incorporated into roadside memorial design. Many times these pictures are laminated to prevent damage from moisture, but over time these pictures eventually fade. Figure 4-18 contains an example



Figure 4-17: Floral memorial of life on State Highway 185
Source: Photo taken by the author.

of a pictorial memorial of life. A picture of a family has been attached just under the wreath.



Figure 4-18: Religious roadside memorial of death with a pictorial memorial of life element along the William H. Natcher Parkway.
Source: Photo taken by the author.

Reminiscent Memorials of Life

Since many memorials are personally created, special tokens are sometimes left to remember the deceased. Reminiscent memorials of life encompass those descendants that

contain a significant memento of remembrance. These are often symbolic items of the dead. An example would be a soccer jersey of a player that died in an automobile crash or Campbell's Tomato Soup cans arranged around a memorial for someone that enjoyed the taste of tomato soup. Figure 4-19 depicts several elements of a reminiscent memorial of life. This fatal crash occurred just a few days before this picture was taken. Although it is classified as a floral memorial of death, it contains many elements of a reminiscent memorial of life, including most notably personal letters and notes to the deceased. Many of these writings wished the individual well and described how much he will be missed until they are reunited in the after-life.



Figure 4-19: Floral roadside memorial of death with elements of a reminiscent memorial of life on Cemetery Road (State Highway 234).
Source: Photo taken by the author.

Figure 4-20 summarizes the types of memorials found in Warren County.

Memorials of death, especially religious roadside memorials of death, which account for 88% of the memorials, are much more common in the county than memorials of life. This might suggest that most roadside memorials are tied to religious meanings and assist in the grieving process since they often symbolize death. Different meanings can be

derived from roadside memorials. Ultimately, the constructor is the only person that knows the true meaning and significance of elements in a memorial, although viewers inevitably construct their own meanings, perhaps different ones. The roadside memorial landscape is only a small portion of the overall symbolic landscape of Warren County. Symbolic meanings are seen throughout the county's built environment. Western Kentucky University, the City of Bowling Green, and Warren County are major producers of these symbols. Buildings are constructed to convey dedication and governmental authority to the community. Statues and historical markers are erected to remember significant founders of the community and other historical events. All of the symbolism found in the built environment, including roadside memorials, composes the symbolic landscape of Warren County.

Warren County Roadside Memorials by Typology

Total Roadside Memorials	25
Memorials of Death	22
Floral	8
Lithic	0
Nominal	3
Relic	1
Religious	10
Memorials of Life	3
Civic	1
Floral	2
Pictorial	0
Reminiscent	0

Figure 4-20: Warren County Roadside Memorials by Typology.

Source: Calculated by the author.

Statistical Analysis

Analyzing the memorials from an urban/rural perspective provides additional insight into this cultural practice of roadside memorial construction. Using the 2000 Census-designated urban area for Bowling Green to delineate urban land uses and rural

land uses, eight were found within the Bowling Green urban area. The remaining 17 were located in the rural portions of the county (Figure 4-21). This type of spatial arrangement supports the hypothesis that most of the memorials would be located along rural highways and can relate to the city and county oversight of memorial practices.

To test the null hypothesis that there is no difference in typology between Warren County memorials found in the urban area and those in the rural area a two sample difference of proportions test was performed (Figure 4-22). For purposes of this research a confidence level of 0.05 was used. The two-sample difference of proportions test yielded a Z_p of 1.26 (p -value = 0.3962). Therefore, the null hypothesis is cannot be rejected. Within this study, there is no difference between memorial typology based on roadside memorials of death and life in urban and rural areas of Warren County. The religious impulse and folk practice that lead to the creation of roadside memorials are widely spread throughout the region and the preference for commemorating the death event in a roadside memorial over celebrating the victim's life is consistent.

The statistics generated are considered weak because of the small sample size of only 25 memorials. There should be at least 30 memorials within the study area to draw reliable conclusions based upon the statistical analysis. The study area could be expanded to include another southcentral Kentucky county to strengthen the reliability of the results.

Urban & Rural Roadside Memorials

Warren County, Kentucky

Summer 2003

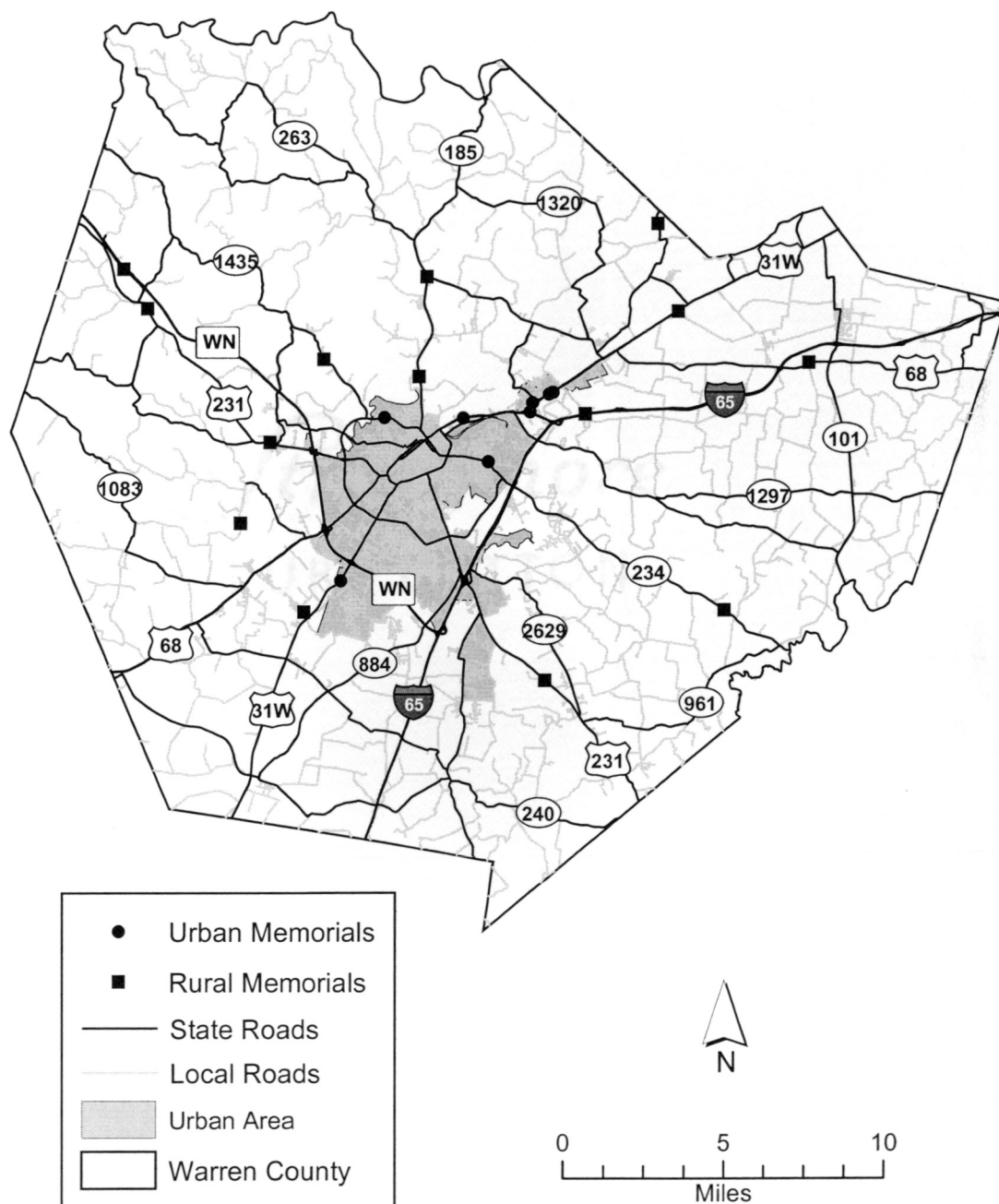


Figure 4-21: Memorials are either found inside or outside of the Bowling Green urban area.

Two Sample Difference of Proportions Test Worktable

Summary Category	Total Number Sampled (n)	Number (proportion) of Memorials of Death (p)	Number (proportion) of Memorials of Life (q)
Urban	8	8 (1.00)	0 (0.00)
Rural	17	14 (0.824)	3 (0.176)

Calculations

$\rho = .880$	$\sigma_{\rho_1 - \rho_2} = .1393$	$Z_{\rho} = 1.26$	$\rho - \text{value} = 0.3962$
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Figure 4-22: Worktable and calculations. For detailed formulas see McGrew and Monroe (2000).

Source: Calculated by the author.

Additional Analysis

Other characteristics exist that are essential to understanding roadside memorial construction in Warren County. Examining additional characteristics of these memorials gives insight into who should be addressing policies pertaining to memorial construction and where additional memorials are likely to be found. Also, understanding that the memorials are essentially a public practice is important in placing this practice in the proper context.

State and Non-State System

The functional classification that the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet uses to describe a road's purpose is a useful tool in determining whether the roadside memorials in Warren County are located along state-maintained roads or local streets. All roads under this classification scheme are state-maintained roads except for those classified as local streets. Figure 4-23 separates the memorials into two classes: those that are situated on state-maintained rights-of-way and those memorials that are located along local streets and usually maintained by the city or county governments. Only five are located on local streets' rights-of-way, while the 20 other memorials are situated on state-maintained rights-of-way. These placements support the hypothesis that the memorials in Warren County are located adjacent to state-maintained roadways and points to the need

Memorials on State-Maintained Roads

Warren County, Kentucky

Summer 2003

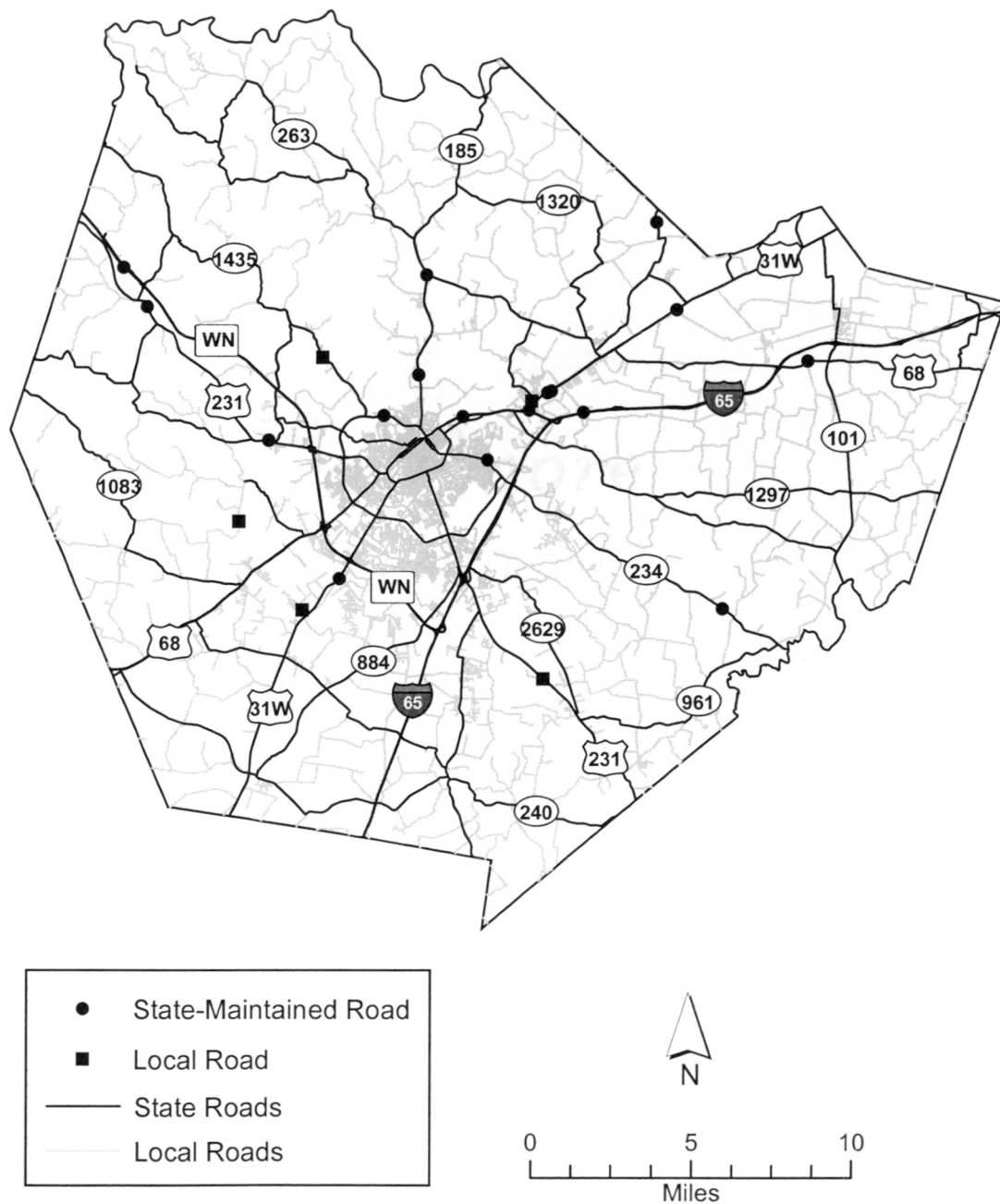


Figure 4-23: Memorials are located either on state-maintained roads or local roads.

for having a consistent statewide policy for handling memorials.

Two-Lane Highways

The number of lanes that compose a highway is another characteristic of roadside memorial construction. Those highways with two lanes have been identified by the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet as the most dangerous roadways in the Commonwealth. Figure 4-24 depicts the roadside memorials that are found along two-lane roads. The majority of the roadside memorials, 17, were found along these roads. The remaining eight were located along highways with more than two lanes. This also supports the hypothesis that the memorials in Warren County are mostly located along two-lane highways.

Number of Vehicles Passing Memorials

Roadside memorials are an inherently public practice. Although some memorials may be constructed as a private form of grief, drivers often see these displays. An interesting examination of this practice is to analyze the memorials by the number of vehicles that travel a highway each day.

The number of cars passing a road segment daily is known as the Average Daily Traffic or ADT. The ADT can give an indication of how many people possibly see a particular roadside memorial on a given day. These traffic counts cannot be taken every year, so they are done only every few years with a computer program interpolating the actual ADT for a specific year. Figure 4-25 shows memorials located on lesser-traveled roadways like State Highway 1435 with smaller circles, while memorials on more heavily traveled highways like Interstate 65 are depicted with larger circles. It appears that most memorials are on more heavily traveled roadways from 2,001 to 50,000

Number of Highway Lanes

Memorials along Two Lane Highways

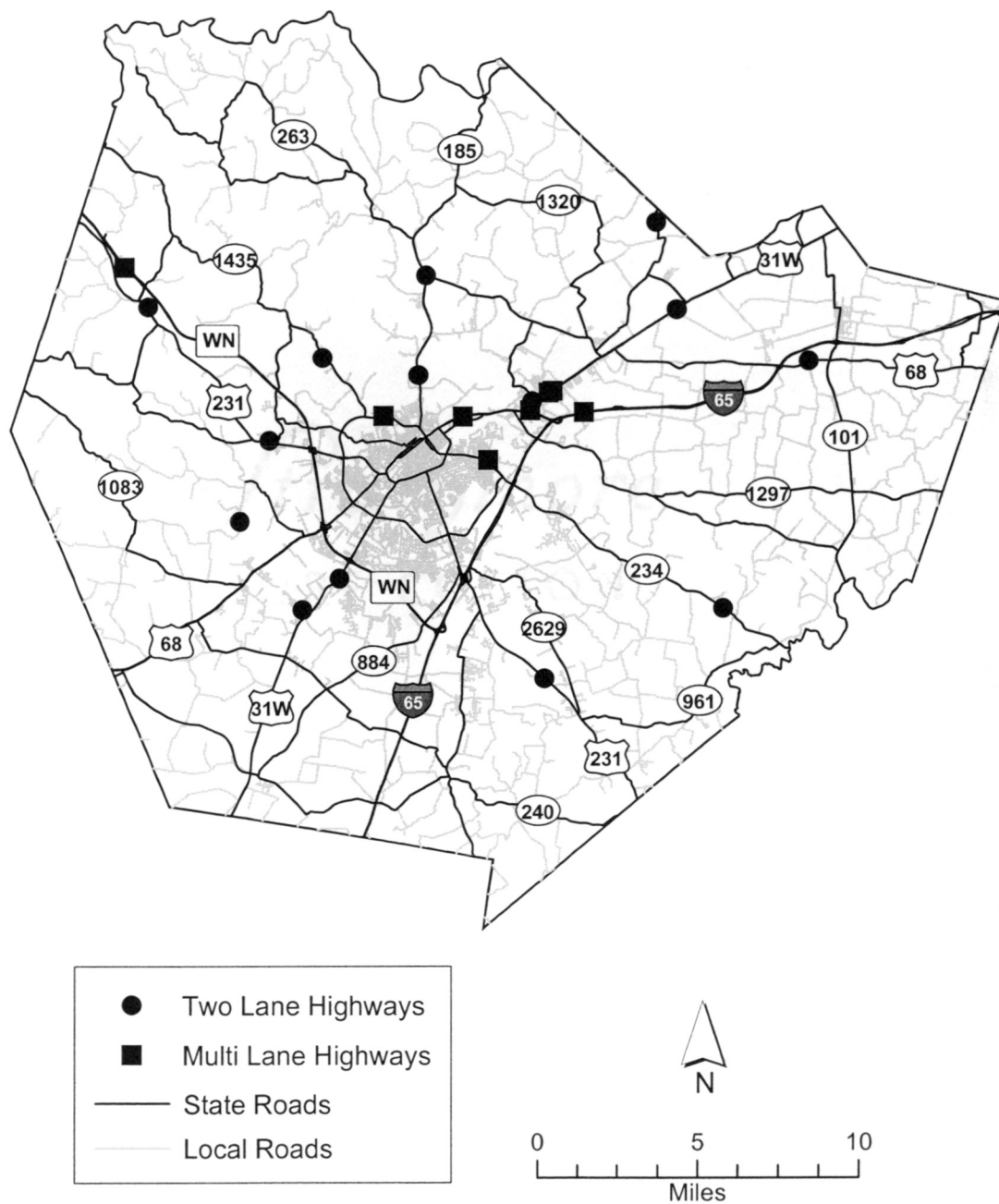
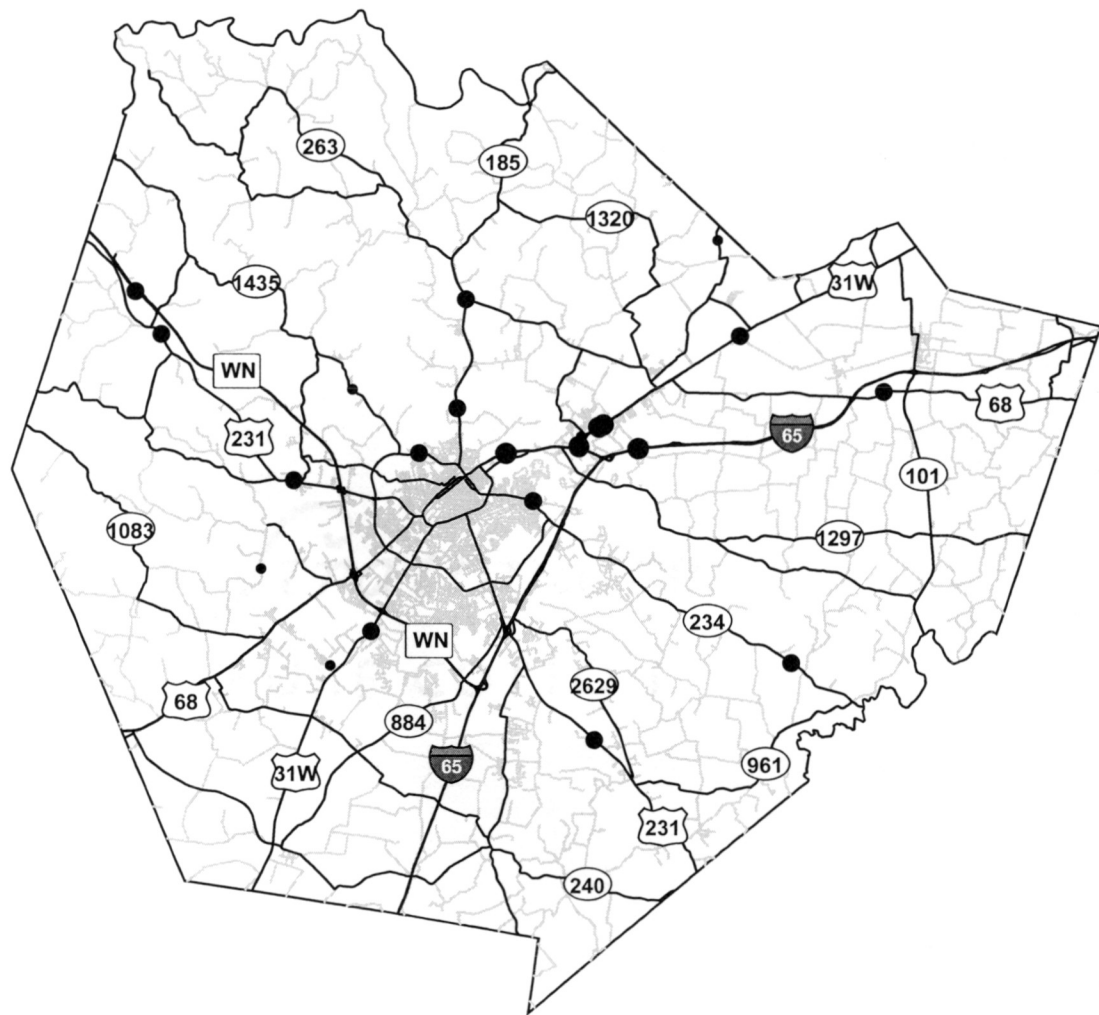


Figure 4-24: Memorials are primarily located along two lane highways in Warren County.

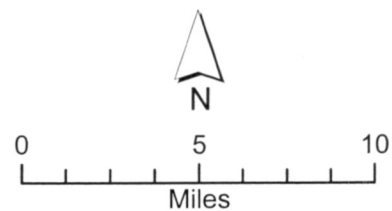
Number of Vehicles Passing Memorials

2003 Computer Estimates



- 0 - 2,000 Vehicles/Day
- 2,001 - 20,000 Vehicles/Day
- 20,001 - 50,000 Vehicles/Day

— State Roads
 — Local Roads



Source: Kentucky Transportation Cabinet's
 Division of Planning, 2003

Figure 4-25: The estimated number of vehicles that pass a memorial each day.

vehicles per day. This trend makes sense, as with more vehicles on these roadways, there is a greater probability that someone will have a fatal collision; however, it should be noted that Interstate 65, the major carrier of traffic through the region, has the highest number of fatal crashes, but it has only one memorial. Although in this instance, one's probability of being in a fatal crash is statistically less than someone on a lesser-traveled, two-lane highway. Also, Interstate 65 travelers are more likely to be from other parts of the country, so it is less feasible for family members to build and maintain memorials along that type of highway (Kentucky Transportation Center 2002).

Figure 4-26 depicts a roadside memorial of death located on McLellan Road in southern Bowling Green. This portion of McLellan Road only leads traffic into a rather small but developing residential neighborhood comprised of single-family homes. Traveling west into the neighborhood, one cannot see this roadside memorial. It is only when one leaves this subdivision that the memorial becomes apparent. It is not an obvious roadside memorial, and there was some question on the researcher's behalf that this was a memorial for a traffic fatality. McLellan Road leading into this subdivision has relatively low traffic volumes since it is not an arterial street, and the roadway itself gives no indication of potentially hazardous driving conditions. Despite these doubts, it was confirmed in two articles found on the *Daily News Online* (2002a; b) that the memorial was for a traffic death.

The fact that some drivers view roadside memorials as a safety warning cannot be ignored. Departments of Transportation capitalize on this possible interpretation of the memorials and through programs that place standardized signs, which also promote this interpretation.



Figure 4-26: A “hidden” roadside memorial along McLellan Road.
Source: Photo taken by the author.

Building Upon Previous Roadside Memorial Research

Previous research on this practice was performed by another Master’s student at Western Kentucky University. Zimmerman (1995) conducted an analysis of this cultural practice in Warren County and four other counties surrounding it. In contrast to the current research, much of Zimmerman’s research emphasized interviews with memorial constructors. Also, his method of collecting data differed. He drove the more heavily traveled roads and consulted with local police and coroners to determine memorial locations. Zimmerman identified 31 memorials in the five counties in 1995. One should consider that 25 were found in this research in 2003 in Warren County alone.

Zimmerman also captured a couple of roadside memorials that are still in existence today. Of the 12 memorials that he found in Warren County, only two memorials analyzed in this study were also described in his work. The roadside memorial depicted in Figures 4-27a through 4-27d was featured in Zimmerman’s research. He described a white cross with coded language on the horizontal reading

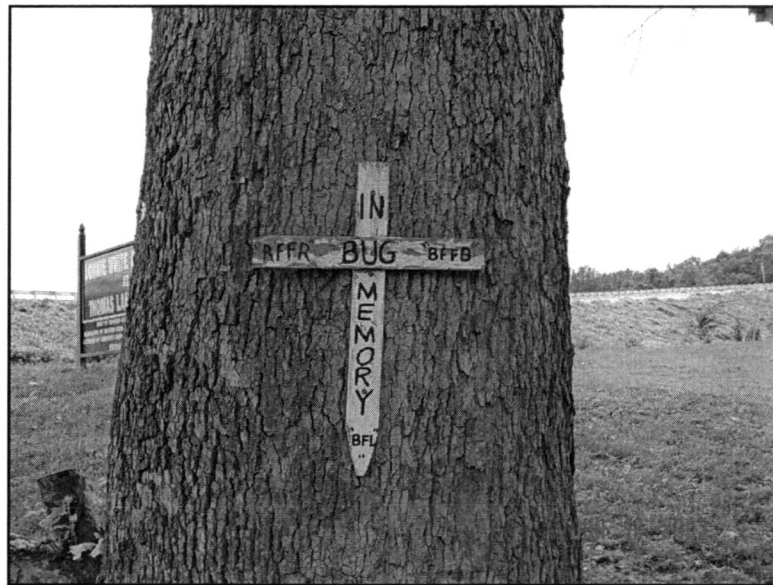


Figure 4-27a: A cross nailed to a tree along Old Barren River Road.
Source: Photo taken by the author.

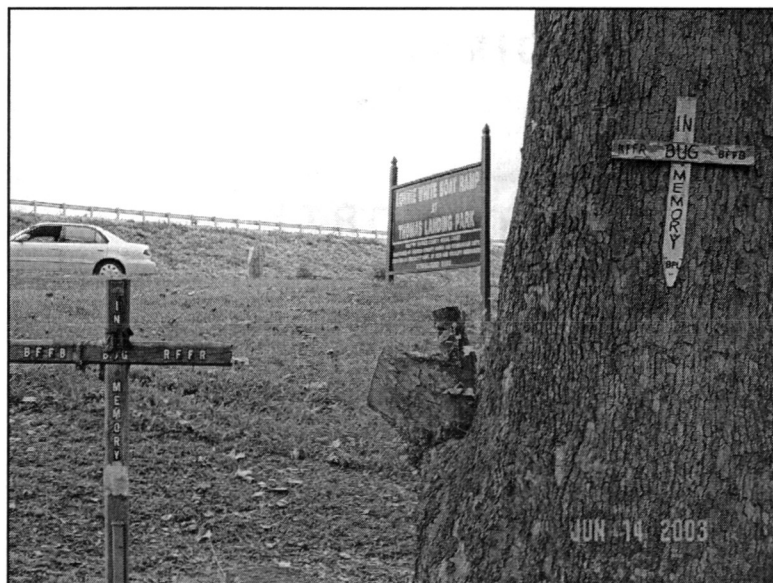


Figure 4-27b: Another cross containing a coded message sits next to the tree.
Source: Photo taken by the author.



Figure 4-27c: A bench constructed to symbolize angels' wings with a coded message sits next to the crosses.

Source: Photo taken by the author.

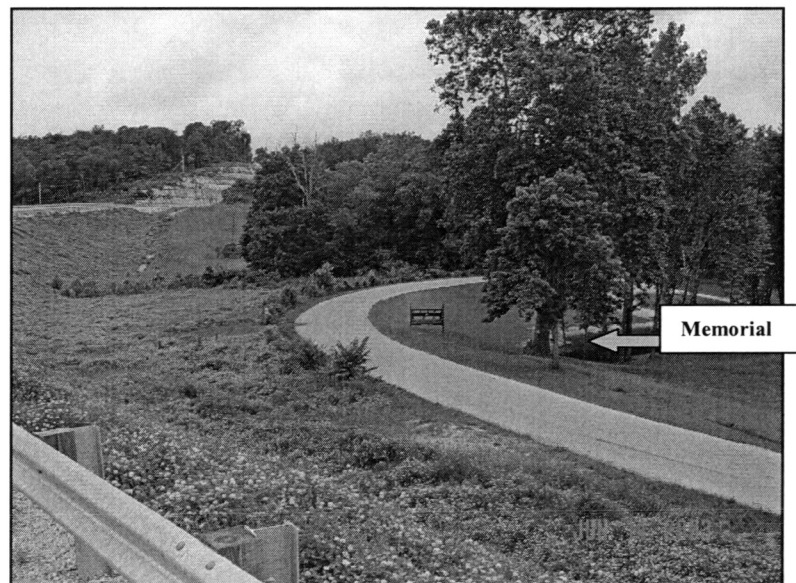


Figure 4-27d: View from the new highway that cars now travel to avoid the windy, dangerous roadway once traveled.

Source: Photo taken by the author.

“RFFR ‘BUG’ BFFB.” This cross is nailed to a tree along Old Barren River Road (Figure 4-27a). Nothing else is described of this memorial or the significance of the site. This area has likely been transformed in recent years with additional memorial materials. Another cross has been constructed out of wood with red reflectors accenting the sides

(Figure 4-27b). A bench-like area is also located adjacent to the new, larger cross with the same coded language (Figure 4-27c). This location has a sacred appeal because of the ongoing significance of the site since 1995. The property owner stopped to ask the researcher if he was a relative of the man who died there. He said that his family will usually come back from Owensboro around Father's Day and other special occasions to take care of the area. The man was killed after coming around a curve on a motorcycle and slamming into a fence post. That curve has now been bypassed by the main highway since the Transportation Cabinet reconstructed portions of the highway. The new highway now sits graded above the crash site (Figure 4-27d). He also mentioned that the bench-like rocks were actually symbolic of an angel's wings. Zimmerman also could not find a crash date, but this area has obviously been maintained for some time as a sacred location.

The other memorial mentioned in Zimmerman's research is still located on Old U.S. Highway 231 (Figure 4-28). Another interesting note about this location is that the Transportation Cabinet is currently in the process of relocating and realigning this portion of U.S. Highway 231 from Bowling Green to Scottsville. This cross was once on the heavily traveled portion of the highway, but, since the new portion of U. S. Highway 231 opened in 2003, it is now situated on a frontage road. Zimmerman mentioned the memorial as being a simple wooden cross with flowers, and the neighbors will occasionally mow around the memorial to ensure highway personnel do not trash it. He was also able to interview the memorial constructors for his study. A 60 year-old man died in the crash that occurred on January 24, 1991. This cross has obviously been replaced several times since the crash date, but the memorial still exists with a wooden

cross and the neighbors still mow around the area.

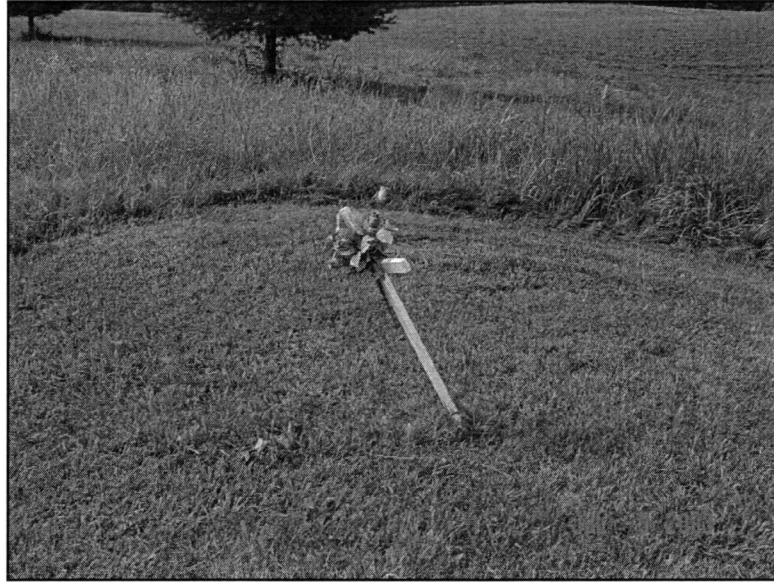


Figure 4-28: A memorial still maintained and regularly updated along Old U.S. Highway 231.

Source: Photo taken by the author.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

Error in Conducting Research

Most scientific research has some error, either due to research bias or to the methods used to undertake the research that cause some type of fallacy. Like much of science, this study also contains several sources of error that should be discussed to ensure the research is used in its appropriate context.

There is error in technology, in this case the GPS unit, a handheld Garmin Etrex Legend. Although not 100% accurate, the accuracy of global positioning systems has increased over time. The units are even more precise since selective availability was turned off by the United States military. During data collection, the measurements of the GPS unit were off by approximately 15 to 30 feet. For the analysis of this study's data, this accuracy is sufficient, but if these coordinates were used to locate a memorial precisely, there would be some problems with the data's accuracy.

Another error also existed in the collection phase. This error can be attributed to human and procedural error. Memorials along the roadway may have been missed by the researcher. Fatigue, inattention, or misinterpretation of a memorial are all factors contributing to this error. Also, since the roadways were only driven in one direction, some of the memorials, which were only visible when traveling that particular direction may have been missed.

Additionally, this landscape of commemoration is constantly changing. Some of the memorials that were captured during the summer of 2003 no longer exist. Other memorials may have been established during this time that were not located. To

minimize the error in searching for new memorials, the researcher scanned the local paper looking for fatal crash articles on a regular basis. If one occurred, the researcher would regularly check that approximate location to see if a memorial had been established.

Error in Analysis

Analyzing this memorial database is another source of error in the research. The sample size was not large enough to formulate accurate conclusions when using the two sample difference of proportions test. With only 25 memorials found, the study area should be expanded to include another BRADD county to draw conclusions appropriately using that statistical test.

Assigning a memorial to a particular class within the typology is another source of error. Oftentimes, memorials displayed so many different elements, so assigning one memorial as a memorial of life instead of a memorial death was sometimes difficult. To minimize the effects of this error, the elements were tabulated in each category and the type with the most elements became that memorial's typology.

Research Implications

There are several implications of this research. One important implication is the understanding of this cultural practice. This research highlights that this practice blurs theoretical boundaries between church and state. People are more lenient when addressing this issue because the practice has such emotional ties with death and grieving. This research might help local officials and highway office personnel to address the issue of roadside memorial construction with a deeper understanding of this issue and its complications. This study also captures a significant display of religion in

society that is often overlooked. Psychologists and sociologists that study bereavement and cultural practices should be interested in this type of study to learn about people's perceptions of these memorials as a significant component of the grieving process and spirituality.

This study also contributes significantly to geoscience research. Knowledge of the spatial variations of this practice is not comprehensive. This research fills this gap in knowledge in several ways. First, this research focuses on a smaller city and its surrounding rural area. Secondly, it researches religious practices and concepts. Finally, previous folk studies research has examined this topic, but very few cases have studied the significant spatial component of this practice. This research highlights differences over space and examines this significant component.

Future Research Possibilities

Additional research opportunities can be generated from this thesis. This is a subject that could see increased interest because of other high-profile issues that challenge civil involvement in personal and spiritual matters. Future research should examine states that have instituted an alternate program that uses uniform highway markers to commemorate sites of crash victims. Factors that might be considered in future research include people's perception of this program and the actual effectiveness of the program. Are people still constructing personal roadside memorials? Has the program been effective in reducing personal roadside memorial construction? Has it changed the way people view and interpret the signs? Has it reduced highway costs because personnel are no longer using time to remove the memorials or actually increased costs because personnel have to produce and establish these signs?

Further research should examine these memorials in large cities such as New York and Chicago. Are the religious influences on death and dying as prevalent in these metropolitan areas as in rural areas? Are memorials less likely to remain in place because of the density of development and greater probability of someone disturbing the memorial? What differences can be seen in the elements that compose these memorials compared to those in rural areas? Is this even an issue in a large urban area? Future studies should also ask these questions about memorial construction in other countries.

Ethnographic research should also be conducted through interviews with people erecting roadside memorials. This research's typology tried to uncover some of the meanings embedded in roadside memorials. This meaning could more effectively be revealed by talking with these individuals.

Finally, additional research should examine this practice along with other controversial practices in America in which social opinions are dynamic and laws have not been developed. An example includes developers of a website (perverted-justice.com) that pose as boys or girls and surf internet chat rooms. In these rooms, they develop conversations with individuals, typically men, about sex. These conversations are then posted on their website, usually with pictures, for others to read and expose these pedophiles. The website developers feel its site is conducting a community service by embarrassing these individuals and bringing a type of community justice in which the police typically will not participate. Television stations often team up with the website; however, local police discourage this type of internet vigilance. There are no laws stopping this type of work, and a number of people feel that this type of work is socially acceptable. This practice receives a great deal of attention and discouragement from

local police, but no laws exist to discourage or encourage this type of activity in many states.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the practice and process of roadside memorial construction is a persistent cultural practice, is a controversial issue dependent upon local policies and social influences, and is not necessarily restricted to a certain road type. This practice appears to span many different cultures, all linked by a common mode of transportation—the automobile. Roadside memorial construction exists in the southern and southwestern United States and even in Ireland. Numerous instances can be found and documented in which a roadside memorial was erected for a traffic death victim. Most times, the issue of roadside memorial construction does not spark debate and others view these memorials as just that, a memorial honoring a victim; however, if questioned, these memorials can become sources of controversy similar to a Ten Commandments monument in a county courthouse. Also, this practice is not specific to one road type. Roadside memorials are found on all types of roads ranging from interstates to two-lane highways, urban or rural. The ubiquitous nature of these memorials makes them an important cultural practice to understand. All of these statements about the overall practice of roadside memorial construction appear to be true in Warren County.

Specifically in Warren County, Kentucky, this analysis indicates that roadside memorials exist throughout the county, typically on state-maintained, heavier-traveled roadways. They are also found in rural areas along two-lane highways, but also exist in urban areas. The roadside memorials reflect the region's tie to Christianity, particularly the Southern Baptist denomination of the Protestant faith, and they are not encouraged,

discouraged, or prohibited by formal local, state, or federal policies. The maps and analyses depict the spatial pattern of memorial locations in the county. They exist throughout the region but are primarily located along state-maintained, heavier-traveled roadways, making most of them public forms of expressing grief and honoring loved ones. Most of these memorials exist in the rural portions of the county; however, memorials are constructed within the more urbanized portions of the city. These memorials also capture the region's tie to Protestant religions because there are no obvious signs of Catholic traditions within the memorials in the study area and religious census information reveals that Southern Baptists comprise the majority of practicing Christians in the county and region. These memorials are also being established because no specific law or program has been instituted to discourage their construction within the county.

Cultural landscapes can include a multitude of individual and group practices, attitudes and beliefs, or almost anything that one considers as part of culture. Roadside memorials can provide researchers invaluable information about culture. This vernacular cultural practice has received little scientific attention. As another form of expressing grief for many individuals, roadside memorials can be another step in learning more about humans and their culture.

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APPENDIX 1: ROADSIDE MEMORIAL DATABASE SUMMARY

Appendix 1 contains all the memorials found while performing this research. A map with a corresponding number is presented along with a page for each memorial's characteristics. Each page includes a picture with the following information:

Memorial Number – This number corresponds with the number on the map.

Brief Description – A short description of the memorial and its elements.

On Highway – The memorial is located along the “on highway.”

At Highway – If at an intersection, the “at highway” is the intersecting street.

Latitude – The latitude of the location as recorded by the GPS unit.

Longitude – The longitude of the location as recorded by the GPS unit.

Date Found – The date the memorial was first found (may not correspond with the date in the picture)

Date of Wreck – The date of the car crash, if known.

Urban Area – Is the memorial located within the Bowling Green urban area? Yes or no.

City Limits – Is the memorial located within the Bowling Green city limits? Yes or no.

Two Lane – Is the memorial located along a two lane highway? Yes or no.

Roadway Classification – The memorial is located along this functional classification of roadway designated by the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet.

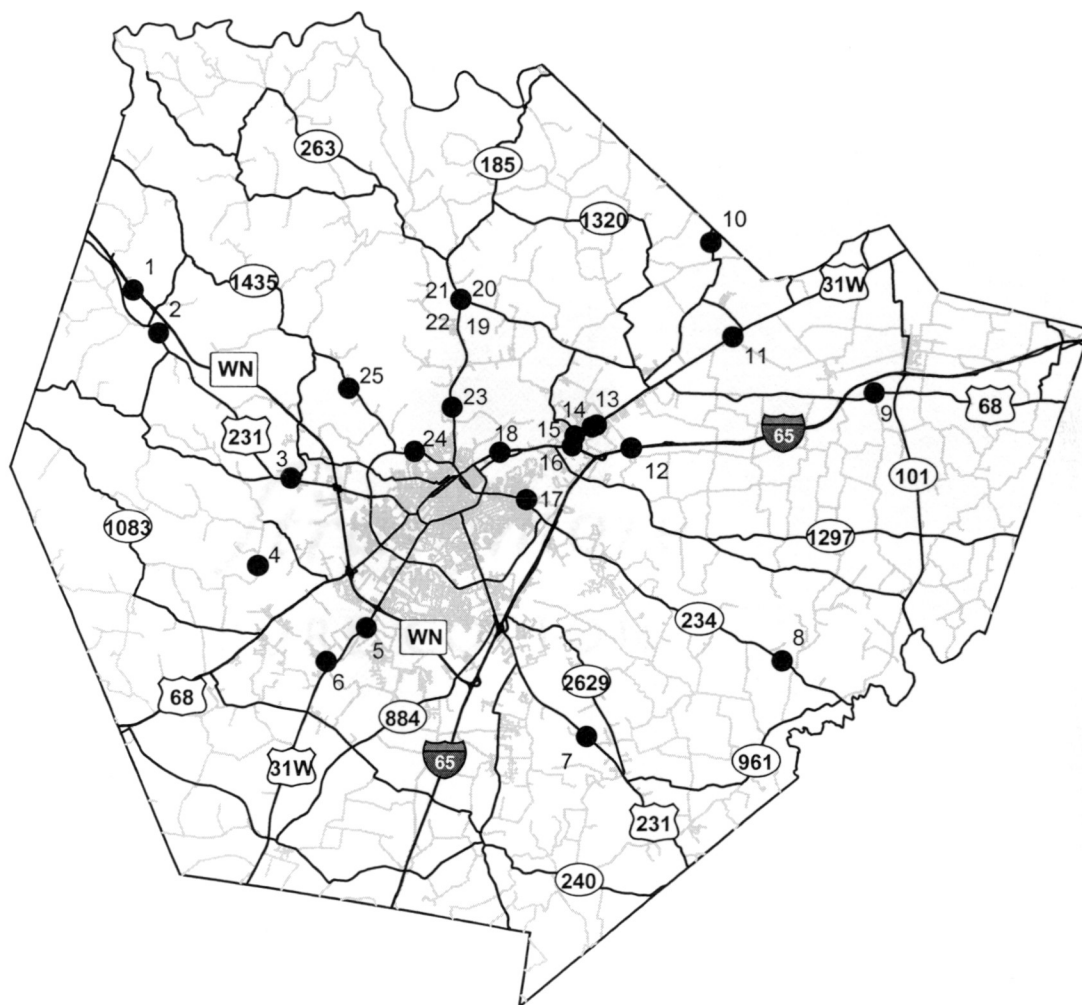
ADT – The average daily traffic or traffic volume estimated by the Kentucky Transportation Cabinet in 2003.

Memorial Typology – The memorial's typology according to symbolic elements.

Roadside Memorials

Warren County, Kentucky

Summer 2003





Memorial Number: 1

Brief Description: Two crosses on mile marker 16, one white cross and one brown cross with yellow and blue ribbons. A floral wreath with picture sits blown over at the site.

On Highway: William H. Natcher Parkway

At Highway: n/a

Latitude: 37.074017° N **Longitude:** 86.611567° W

Date Found: July 13, 2003

Date of Wreck: December 4, 2002

Urban Area: No

City Limits: No

Two Lane: No

Roadway Classification: Rural Principal Arterial

ADT: 9,100

Memorial Typology: Religious Roadside Memorial of Death



Memorial Number: 2

Brief Description: Wreath with John Deere Tractor buttons-weathered.

On Highway: U.S. Highway 231

At Highway: n/a

Latitude: 37.056333° N **Longitude:** 86.597867° W

Date Found: June 14, 2003

Date of Wreck: February 13, 2002

Urban Area: No

City Limits: No

Two Lane: Yes

Roadway Classification: Rural Major Collector

ADT: 2,030

Memorial Typology: Floral Roadside Memorial of Death



Memorial Number: 3

Brief Description: Metal cross with name shaped in metal and pictures, flowers, and wreaths nailed to tree. Additional floral materials are at the base of the memorial, a couple of floral crosses.

On Highway: U.S. Highway 231

At Highway: n/a

Latitude: 36.996383° N **Longitude:** 86.528417° W

Date Found: April 27, 2003

Date of Wreck: n/a

Urban Area: No

City Limits: No

Two Lane: Yes

Roadway Classification: Rural Major Collector

ADT: 6,470

Memorial Typology: Floral Roadside Memorial of Death



Memorial Number: 4

Brief Description: Bottom half of floral cross in front yard.

On Highway: Blue Level-Providence Road

At Highway: n/a

Latitude: 36.959683° N **Longitude:** 86.5449° W

Date Found: June 14, 2003

Date of Wreck: n/a

Urban Area: No

City Limits: No

Two Lane: Yes

Roadway Classification: Rural Local Street

ADT: n/a

Memorial Typology: Religious Roadside Memorial of Death



Memorial Number: 5

Brief Description: Red and white floral cross with reflector.

On Highway: U.S. Highway 31-W (Nashville Road)

At Highway: n/a

Latitude: 36.93425° N **Longitude:** 86.488267° W

Date Found: June 21, 2003

Date of Wreck: n/a

Urban Area: Yes

City Limits: Yes

Two Lane: Yes

Roadway Classification: Urban Minor Arterial Street

ADT: 13,300

Memorial Typology: Religious Roadside Memorial of Death



Memorial Number: 6

Brief Description: Wooden cross nailed to tree with wooden lily cut out, painted, and nailed to the cross.

On Highway: McLellan Road

At Highway: n/a

Latitude: 36.919917° N **Longitude:** 86.508967° W

Date Found: June 21, 2003

Date of Wreck: April 3, 2002

Urban Area: No **City Limits:** Yes **Two Lane:** Yes

Roadway Classification: Urban Local Street

ADT: n/a

Memorial Typology: Religious Roadside Memorial of Death



Memorial Number: 7

Brief Description: White wooden cross with flowers. A mowed circle is around the cross and a mowed path leading to the cross.

On Highway: Old U.S. Highway 231

At Highway: n/a

Latitude: 36.8896° N **Longitude:** 86.372667° W

Date Found: July 5, 2003

Date of Wreck: January 24, 1991

Urban Area: No **City Limits:** No **Two Lane:** Yes

Roadway Classification: Rural Principal Arterial

ADT: 11,300

Memorial Typology: Religious Roadside Memorial of Death



Memorial Number: 8

Brief Description: Two white crosses with yellow bows and yellow and purple flowers.

On Highway: U.S. Highway 231

At Highway: n/a

Latitude: 36.921917° N **Longitude:** 86.272317° W

Date Found: April 27, 2003

Date of Wreck: October 22, 2002

Urban Area: No **City Limits:** No **Two Lane:** Yes

Roadway Classification: Rural Major Collector

ADT: 2,010

Memorial Typology: Floral Roadside Memorial of Death



Memorial Number: 9

Brief Description: White wooden cross with name, birth date, and crash date of the deceased.

On Highway: U.S. Highway 68/State Highway 80

At Highway: n/a

Latitude: 36.03405° N **Longitude:** 86.225417° W

Date Found: June 22, 2003

Date of Wreck: April 28, 2001

Urban Area: No **City Limits:** No **Two Lane:** Yes

Roadway Classification: Rural Major Collector

ADT: 5,380

Memorial Typology: Nominal Roadside Memorial of Death



Memorial Number: 10

Brief Description: Wreath with flowers and house ornament nailed to a tree.

On Highway: State Highway 743

At Highway: n/a

Latitude: 37.0965° N **Longitude:** 86.311° W

Date Found: June 6, 2003

Date of Wreck: February 27, 2001

Urban Area: No **City Limits:** No **Two Lane:** Yes

Roadway Classification: Rural Minor Collector

ADT: 1,310

Memorial Typology: Floral Roadside Memorial of Life



Memorial Number: 11

Brief Description: White cross with name and death date, yellow flowers, and red reflectors.

On Highway: U.S. Highway 31-W

At Highway: n/a

Latitude: 37.056983° N **Longitude:** 86.29925° W

Date Found: March 16, 2003

Date of Wreck: December 10, 1996

Urban Area: No **City Limits:** No **Two Lane:** Yes

Roadway Classification: Rural Major Collector

ADT: 6,880

Memorial Typology: Nominal Roadside Memorial of Death



Memorial Number: 12

Brief Description: White cross with name near mile marker 29. Possible original memorial still located next to it that was covered when the roadway was reconstructed.

On Highway: Interstate 65

At Highway: n/a

Latitude: 37.0102° N **Longitude:** 86.351067° W

Date Found: September 6, 2003

Date of Wreck: August 11, 1999

Urban Area: Yes **City Limits:** No **Two Lane:** No

Roadway Classification: Urban Interstate

ADT: 43,500

Memorial Typology: Religious Roadside Memorial of Death



Memorial Number: 13

Brief Description: Three floral arrangement crosses supported by metal pipes.

On Highway: U.S. Highway 31-W (Louisville Road)

At Highway: n/a

Latitude: 37.019833° N **Longitude:** 86.36905° W

Date Found: September 6, 2003

Date of Wreck: n/a

Urban Area: Yes

City Limits: Yes

Two Lane: No

Roadway Classification: Urban Minor Arterial Street

ADT: 23,200

Memorial Typology: Religious Roadside Memorial of Death



Memorial Number: 14

Brief Description: Wooden cross with purple flowers-title sideways. A missing floral arrangement next to the cross.

On Highway: U.S. Highway 31-W (Louisville Road)

At Highway: n/a

Latitude: 37.018967° N **Longitude:** 86.371333° W

Date Found: March 16, 2003

Date of Wreck: n/a

Urban Area: Yes

City Limits: Yes

Two Lane: No

Roadway Classification: Urban Minor Arterial Street

ADT: 23,200

Memorial Typology: Floral Roadside Memorial of Death



Memorial Number: 15

Brief Description: A book representing the Bible with pink flowers on one page and a scripture verse on the other page.

On Highway: Plum Springs Loop

At Highway: n/a

Latitude: 37.015117° N **Longitude:** 86.3804° W

Date Found: July 13, 2003

Date of Wreck: n/a

Urban Area: Yes

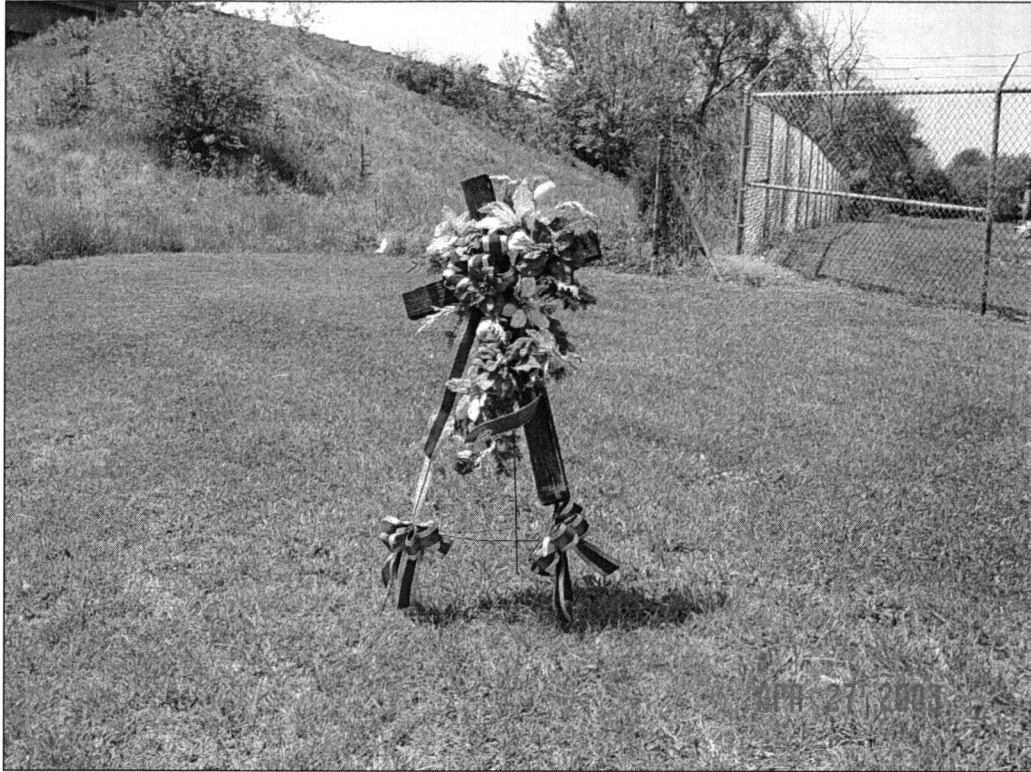
City Limits: Yes

Two Lane: Yes

Roadway Classification: Urban Collector Street

ADT: n/a

Memorial Typology: Religious Roadside Memorial of Death



Memorial Number: 16

Brief Description: Large wooden cross with flowers and red bows.

On Highway: U.S. Highway 31-W (Louisville Road)

At Highway: State Highway 446 (I-65 Connector)

Latitude: 37.010967° N **Longitude:** 86.381633° W

Date Found: April 27, 2003

Date of Wreck: n/a

Urban Area: Yes

City Limits: Yes

Two Lane: No

Roadway Classification: Urban Minor Arterial Street

ADT: 24,600

Memorial Typology: Floral Roadside Memorial of Death



Memorial Number: 17

Brief Description: Mementos of flowers, notes, coins, flags, pictures, and crosses.

On Highway: State Highway 234 (Cemetery Road)

At Highway: Cherokee Drive

Latitude: 36.988317° N **Longitude:** 86.40515° W

Date Found: May 22, 2003

Date of Wreck: May 21, 2003

Urban Area: Yes

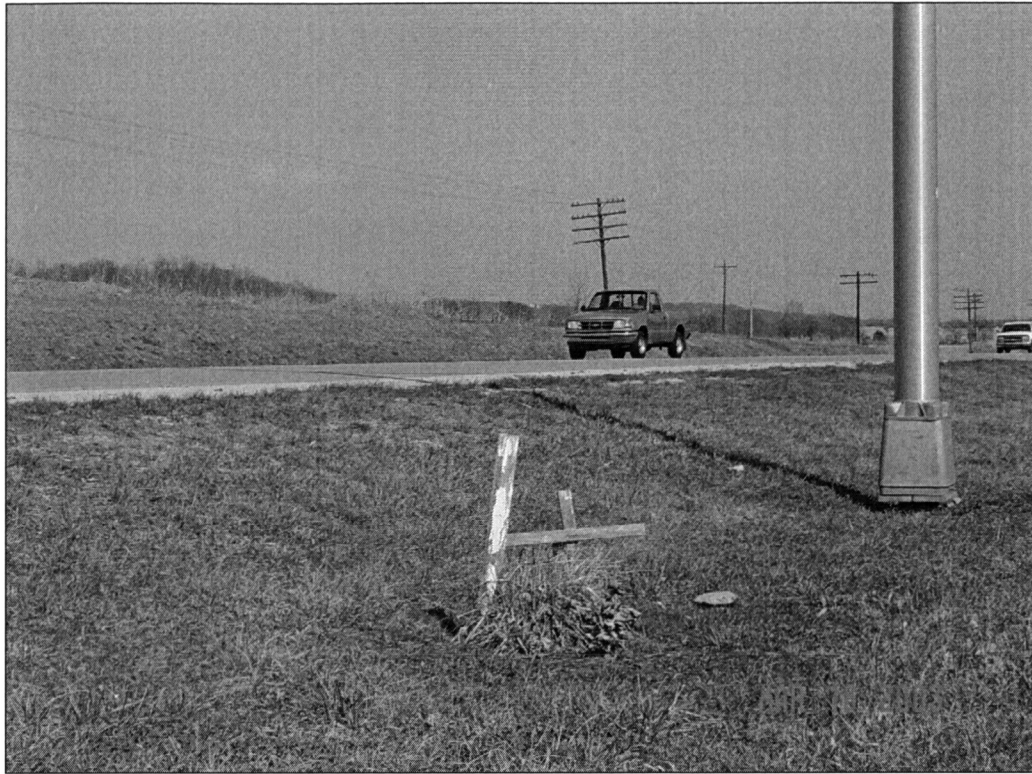
City Limits: Yes

Two Lane: No

Roadway Classification: Urban Minor Arterial Street

ADT: 19,300

Memorial Typology: Floral Roadside Memorial of Death



Memorial Number: 18

Brief Description: Faded white cross with faded purple flowers in median.

On Highway: U.S. Highway 31-W (Louisville Road)

At Highway: n/a

Latitude: 37.007017° N **Longitude:** 86.4188° W

Date Found: March 16, 2003

Date of Wreck: n/a

Urban Area: Yes

City Limits: Yes

Two Lane: No

Roadway Classification: Urban Principal Arterial

ADT: 21,600

Memorial Typology: Floral Roadside Memorial of Death



Memorial Number: 19

Brief Description: Metal, ornate cross nailed into rock cut.

On Highway: State Highway 185

At Highway: State Highway 526

Latitude: 37.071683° N **Longitude:** 86.440567° W

Date Found: March 16, 2003

Date of Wreck: n/a

Urban Area: No

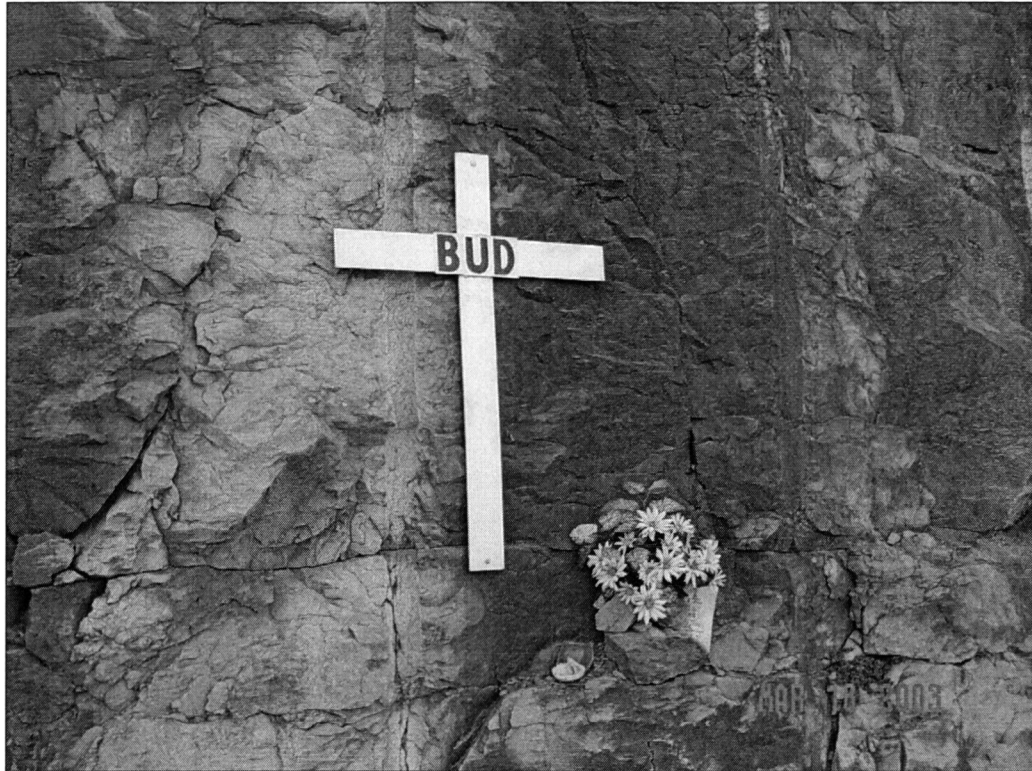
City Limits: No

Two Lane: Yes

Roadway Classification: Rural Minor Collector

ADT: 6,840

Memorial Typology: Religious Roadside Memorial of Death



Memorial Number: 20

Brief Description: White cross with flowers, name, obituary, and car parts on the ground.

On Highway: State Highway 185

At Highway: State Highway 526

Latitude: 37.071683° N **Longitude:** 86.440567° W

Date Found: March 16, 2003

Date of Wreck: n/a

Urban Area: No

City Limits: No

Two Lane: Yes

Roadway Classification: Rural Minor Collector

ADT: 6,840

Memorial Typology: Relic Roadside Memorial of Death



Memorial Number: 21

Brief Description: Wooden cross with floral wreath, deflated “Happy Birthday” balloon, and picture.

On Highway: State Highway 185

At Highway: State Highway 526

Latitude: 37.071683° N **Longitude:** 86.440567° W

Date Found: March 16, 2003

Date of Wreck: n/a

Urban Area: No

City Limits: No

Two Lane: Yes

Roadway Classification: Rural Minor Collector

ADT: 6,840

Memorial Typology: Floral Roadside Memorial of Life



Memorial Number: 22

Brief Description: Wooden cross with wreath of lights.

On Highway: State Highway 185

At Highway: State Highway 526

Latitude: 37.071683° N **Longitude:** 86.440567° W

Date Found: March 16, 2003

Date of Wreck: n/a

Urban Area: No

City Limits: No

Two Lane: Yes

Roadway Classification: Rural Minor Collector

ADT: 6,840

Memorial Typology: Religious Roadside Memorial of Death



Memorial Number: 23

Brief Description: Wooden cross with floral wreath and deflated balloon.

On Highway: State Highway 185

At Highway: n/a

Latitude: 37.026517° N **Longitude:** 86.4444° W

Date Found: March 16, 2003

Date of Wreck: n/a

Urban Area: No

City Limits: No

Two Lane: Yes

Roadway Classification: Rural Major Collector

ADT: 9,120

Memorial Typology: Floral Roadside Memorial of Death



Memorial Number: 24

Brief Description: Yellow cross with name and flowers supported by barbwire fence.

On Highway: State Highway 880 (Veterans Memorial Boulevard)

At Highway: Craighead Lane

Latitude: 37.008017° N **Longitude:** 86.463967° W

Date Found: April 27, 2003

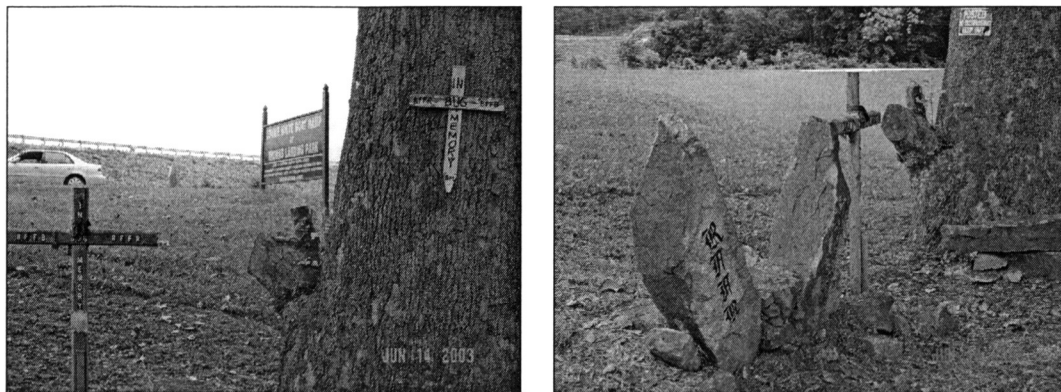
Date of Wreck: February 5, 2001

Urban Area: Yes **City Limits:** Yes **Two Lane:** No

Roadway Classification: Urban Minor Arterial Street

ADT: 15,000

Memorial Typology: Floral Roadside Memorial of Death



Memorial Number: 25

Brief Description: White cross with coded language, rocks symbolic of angel's wings with coded language, and brown wooden cross with coded language.

On Highway: Old Barren River Road

At Highway: n/a

Latitude: 37.03405° N **Longitude:** 86.4988° W

Date Found: June 14, 2003

Date of Wreck: n/a

Urban Area: No

City Limits: No

Two Lane: Yes

Roadway Classification: Rural Minor Collector

ADT: n/a

Memorial Typology: Nominal Roadside Memorial of Death

APPENDIX 2: SUMMARY OF ROADSIDE MEMORIAL POLICIES BY STATE*

Alabama – No Response

The Alabama Department of Transportation provided no information on their policies.

Alaska – Alternate Program**

The Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT&PF) offers three signs that families of crash victims may choose from. These signs cost \$500 and are placed on the right-of-way in the approximate area that the crash occurred. The signs must be installed 200 feet away from existing traffic signs and cannot obstruct the visibility of these signs. Memorial signs are kept in place for two years before they are removed. No other memorials are allowed on the right-of-way, and maintenance crews will remove privately placed memorials.

Arizona – No Response

The Arizona Department of Transportation provided no information on their policies.

Arkansas – Not Allowed

The Arkansas Highway and Transportation Department (AHTD) has a written policy that does not allow for roadside memorials on highway rights-of-way. Unofficially, the AHTD will take several weeks before removing a memorial.

California – Not Allowed

The California Department of Transportation has a formal policy not allowing roadside memorials along rights-of-way. Highway maintenance crews are dispatched to remove roadside memorials in the same manner that they would remove any illegal sign or banner found on the right-of-way.

Colorado – No Policy

The Colorado Department of Transportation (CODOT) does not have a formal policy addressing roadside memorials. They are prohibited if one considers them as abandoned property or litter. CODOT does not give permission to place memorials on highway rights-of-way, and they do not actively remove memorials unless they are deemed a safety hazard or a distraction.

Connecticut – No Response

The Connecticut Department of Transportation provided no information on their policies.

Delaware – No Policy

The Delaware Department of Transportation (DelDOT) does not have a formal policy addressing roadside memorials. Memorials have been allowed to remain in place as long as they do not interfere with motorists' safety. Currently, DelDOT is putting together a group of individuals, legislators, engineers, horticulturists, and citizens who have lost loved ones to address the continual influx of requests for a roadside memorial program. A memorial garden may be set up at the Smyrna Rest Area in Delaware with victims' names engraved on a plaque in front of the garden.

DelDOT already posts signs for DUI deaths, and this signage will continue in addition to the memorial garden program.

Florida – Alternate Program

The Florida Department of Transportation (FDOT) allows uniform markers to be installed along highway rights-of-way to memorialize people who have died as a result of a vehicle related crash and to remind motorists to protect human life by driving safely. The cost of the construction, installation, maintenance, and removal of the memorial marker will be borne by FDOT. Memorial markers will be allowed to remain for a minimum of one year.

Requests for memorial markers shall be submitted in writing to the applicable FDOT Area Maintenance Engineer. Requests may be made by immediate family members or friends, with request from friends requiring the approval of the deceased's immediate family.

Normally, the marker shall remain in place for one year unless it becomes necessary to remove it due to construction or maintenance purposes. If after one year the marker has been removed for any reason, it may be replaced by following the initial request procedure.

There shall be no activities while the memorial marker is in place that pose a safety hazard to the public or violate any provisions of Chapter 316, Florida Statutes, concerning stopping, standing, parking, or obstruction of traffic on public roads.

It is understood that particularly for urban area curb and gutter sections, the memorial marker may not necessarily be placed at the exact location of the fatality due to restricted space, property owner complaints, or other constraints. Exact location will be at the discretion of the Area Maintenance Engineer.

The memorial marker shall consist of a 15" diameter aluminum sign panel with white background of engineering grade sign sheeting, and black letters. The text of the sign will say, "Drive Safely. In Memory." Placement of the deceased's name on the memorial will be at the immediate family's option. The post for installing a memorial marker shall be a standard 5 ft. metal delineator post. Any other additional decorations or ornaments will not be allowed.

Georgia – No Policy

The Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT) has no formal policy outlining how to handle roadside memorials. It is illegal to have roadside memorials along state highway rights-of-way because of state laws covering illegal objects upon encroachments. If the memorial is not a safety hazard, it is typically allowed to remain in place until routine scheduled maintenance activity (unless it is less than 30 days) because of the sensitive nature of this issue. If a great deal of money or personalized efforts have

been made in making the memorial, the GDOT offers the family to remove it first, otherwise the Department removes it for them.

Hawaii – No Response

The Hawaii Department of Transportation provided no information on their policies.

Idaho – No Response

The Idaho Department of Transportation provided no information on their policies.

Illinois – No Policy

The Illinois Department of Transportation (ILDOT) does not have a written policy on roadside memorials. ILDOT does not consider roadside memorials to be a serious issue at this time. Although memorials on state maintained rights-of-way are technically illegal, small memorials that do not cause a potential traffic hazard are left alone. If a memorial is large or presents an obstruction, the family is contacted and asked to remove it, if possible. If this option is not available, highway crews will remove the memorial and hold it for a reasonable amount of time to give the family an opportunity to claim their belongings.

Indiana – No Policy

The Indiana Department of Transportation (INDOT) does not have a formal policy addressing roadside memorials; however, they are considered an illegal encroachment on the highway right-of-way. INDOT has not been very aggressive in responding to such violations.

Indiana law empowers INDOT to remove unauthorized signs, devices, and impediments to traffic from state highway rights-of-way (IC 9-21-4-6). INDOT has always held that roadside memorials fall into this category of prohibited devices and serve to distract motorists as well as interfere with required road maintenance. Further, individuals unnecessarily expose themselves to the danger of passing highway traffic as they place or maintain these displays.

Recognizing that the memorial displays are an important part of the grieving process, over the years INDOT has informally tolerated many of these illegal encroachments. If they do not pose a risk to traffic, the memorials are usually left alone.

INDOT is attempting to formulate a response that will protect public safety yet be respectful and sensitive to a person grieving and dealing with an unexpected loss.

Iowa – No Policy

The Iowa Department of Transportation does not have a formal policy on roadside memorials. They are allowed to remain if they do not pose a safety hazard or interfere with highway operations. This issue is usually handled on a case-by-case basis.

Kansas – No Policy

The Kansas Department of Transportation (KDOT) handles requests for roadside memorials on a case-by-case basis taking in consideration such factors as the type of memorial requested and the roadway characteristics. KDOT is opposed to a state-sponsored, permanent memorial marker program because the signs can pose a potential danger to motorists and the placement of these signs contradicts KDOT's ongoing efforts to decrease the number of signs along highways.

Kentucky – No Policy

The Kentucky Transportation Cabinet has no formal policy or a Policy and Procedures Manual addressing roadside wreaths or memorials within the right-of-way limits of a roadway or bridge. Typically, a memorial remains as long as it does not interfere with maintenance and is not a safety issue.

Louisiana – No Policy

The Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (DOTD) does not have a policy that addresses roadside memorial construction. The DOTD does not actively pursue the removal of memorials unless, of course, they pose a safety hazard.

Maine – No Response

The Maine Department of Transportation provided no information on their policies.

Maryland – No Policy

The Maryland State Highway Administration (SHA) has no formal policy on the erection and removal of roadside memorials. When a request is made to place a memorial, it is denied with a suggestion to the requestor to use another means to memorialize the victim such as planting a tree at a school or place of worship attended by the victim or at another appropriate location, making a gift to an ambulance or rescue unit or hospital that worked to save the victim or to a law enforcement that patrols the highway, placing a memorial on nearby private property, with the property owner's permission, joining the Adopt-a-Highway program in the name of the victim, or participating in "Treemendous Maryland", a program that, for a \$25 contribution, will plant a tree in memory of a person at a designated or otherwise appropriate location throughout the state.

When a memorial is in place, the SHA seldom removes the memorial unless it constitutes a substantial safety hazard or has deteriorated.

Massachusetts – No Policy

The Massachusetts Highway Division (MHD) does not have a formal policy on roadside memorials. They are not allowed on highway rights-of-way; however, an informal policy exists to allow memorials to remain for a short time, provided they do not create a hazard or distraction to motorists. They are then removed during normal roadside maintenance.

Michigan – Not Allowed

The Michigan Department of Transportation (MDOT) does not have a formal policy prohibiting roadside memorial construction; however, MDOT has a policy to remove

such items from the roadway during normal maintenance operations. Larger memorials that pose a safety hazard are removed immediately.

MDOT discourages the erection of memorials whenever possible. They are a safety threat to motorists, as they can be distracting. They also place those persons involved in erecting them at risk and road crews required to remove them. Additionally, it is unlawful for anyone to park along an interstate freeway for anything other than emergencies, permitted roadside cleanup, or road repairs.

MDOT encourages friends and relatives to find another way to memorialize their love one, such as the placement of a tree on private land or in a public park, where it can be properly watered and nurtured.

Minnesota – Not Allowed

The Minnesota Department of Transportation (MNDOT) discourages roadside memorial activity on the highway system because state law prohibits it. In 1999, MNDOT looked at providing guidelines to all eight of their districts. It was decided to allow each district to handle this issue on a case-by-case basis. Currently, MNDOT is in the process of potentially providing a state policy or guideline.

Mississippi – No Response

The Mississippi Department of Transportation provided no information on their policies.

Missouri – No Policy

The Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT) has no specific policy on roadside memorials. They are discouraged for safety reasons, but are usually left undisturbed unless they pose a threat to motorists.

A team consisting of MoDOT, Highway Patrol, MADD, and other representatives is examining the issue and looking for safe, practical solutions.

MoDOT encourages family and friends to use the Adopt-a-Highway program.

Montana – Alternate Program

The Montana Department of Transportation (MTDOT) does not have any statutes addressing roadside memorials, but it has instituted a White Cross Program by the American Legion. This program started in 1952 and is considered a safety program, not a memorial program. One white cross is erected for each traffic fatality. The crosses are made of 4-inch metal and painted white. They are mounted on metal poles painted red. Each white cross is 12 inches wide and 16 inches long. The white cross is supposed to be four to five feet above the ground to improve visibility and aid in road maintenance.

Not all highway fatalities are marked. Due to a federal ruling, white crosses are not allowed along interstate highways. Only about half of the 132 American Legion Posts in Montana currently participate in the program. For these two reasons many stretches of Montana highways do not have white crosses where a fatal crash has occurred. Also,

when a highway is reconstructed and corrects what may have been the cause of the fatality, all crosses are removed. In these cases, only those white crosses, specifically requested by a family member are replaced.

Nebraska – No Policy

The Nebraska Department of Roads does not have a formal policy addressing roadside memorials. When questioned, people are informed that according to “Nebraska Highway & Bridge Law Chapter 39-1359 Rights-of-Way” the memorials are illegal. They are also informed that they may be held liable if a crash occurs because of their memorial. Some memorials are still placed along roadways, and no policy has been formulated to address those memorials.

Nevada – No Response

The Nevada Department of Transportation provided no information on their policies.

New Hampshire – Allowed

The New Hampshire Department of Transportation (NHDOT) has a policy to allow roadside memorials on state rights-of-way for a period of up to six months. At the conclusion of this period, the memorials are removed by highway crews and taken to the nearest patrol facility to be claimed. NHDOT generally discourages the placement of roadside memorials on rights-of-way but recognizes the sensitivity of the subject.

New Jersey – Allowed

The New Jersey Department of Transportation (NJDOT) allows roadside memorials along highways. NJDOT believes in most cases that roadside memorials are not detrimental to the safe operation of the highways, nor an impediment to carrying out the agency’s most basic mission, safety. The Department has a responsibility that the memorial itself is not posing a danger to either the motoring public or to the people that wish to visit it. The appropriate Regional Maintenance Supervisor will make the decision to remove a memorial. If a memorial is removed, it will be deposited at the nearest maintenance yard. Efforts will be made to reach out to family members to advise them that the memorial had to be removed for safety reasons and to see whether they might retrieve the memorial or if a safer location can be found.

New Mexico – No Policy

The New Mexico Department of Transportation does not have any written policy on roadside memorials. The memorials are allowed to remain on the highway as long as they do not pose a safety hazard.

New York – No Policy

The New York Department of Transportation does not have a policy addressing roadside memorials. The Department attempted to formulate a policy regarding roadside memorials several years ago, but due to the sensitive nature of the issue, it was never finalized. Now, the various regional offices are expected to use their discretion regarding memorials. Although they are technically illegal, roadside memorials are rarely removed.

North Carolina – Not Allowed

The North Carolina Department of Transportation (NCDOT) does not allow the placement or erection of crosses, wreaths, signs, or other items as memorials within the highway right-of-way. This is in accordance with the North Carolina General Statutes (NCGS) and the North Carolina Administrative Code (NCAC) which prohibit the “piling of obstructions” and erection of non-regulatory signs, and in keeping with the goal of highway safety.

As an alternative, the Board of Transportation encourages participation in the Adopt-a-Highway Program, which is approved by the Federal Highway Administration and addresses safety concerns and procedures.

North Dakota – No Policy

The North Dakota Department of Transportation (NDDOT) does not have a formal policy addressing roadside memorials. They are allowed, but removed when time and weather have bedraggled them.

Ohio – No Response

The Ohio Department of Transportation provided no information on their policies.

Oklahoma – No Policy

The Oklahoma Department of Transportation (OKDOT) has not written a policy on roadside memorials. They are usually left in place as long as they are not a safety hazard or interfere with maintenance. OKDOT discourages the placement of memorials, but are sympathetic to the families involved.

Oregon – Not Allowed

The Oregon Department of Transportation (ORDOT) says that roadside memorials are illegal on state maintained roads. Some road crews ignore them unless they interfere with maintenance, while other crews make a periodic “sweep” annually or semi-annually to remove them.

An alternate program called the Impaired Driving Victim Memorial Sign (IDVMS) program is available. Certain criteria must be met and certain information must be provided before the sign can be approved.

Pennsylvania – Not Allowed***

The Pennsylvania Department of Transportation’s official policy on roadside memorials as defined in the Traffic Engineering and Operations Manual reads:

“The Department does not grant formal approval for these signs, however, we typically do not remove them unless they pose a safety concern. After a period of time in which the signs and ancillary material remain in a state of disrepair they may be removed.”

Rhode Island – No Policy

The Rhode Island Department of Transportation does not have a formal policy on roadside memorials. If they obstruct motorists' range of vision, they are removed.

South Carolina – No Policy

The South Carolina Department of Transportation (SCDOT) does not have a formal policy addressing roadside memorials. They are normally ignored as long as they do not interfere with routine maintenance operations. Some have been removed by SCDOT after receiving complaints from adjacent property owners.

South Dakota – Alternate Program

The South Dakota Department of Transportation (SDDOT) has a Fatality Marker Program which uses the "THINK" signs. Fatality markers originated in the state in 1979 in an effort to encourage motorists to think about the serious drunk driver problem and the dangerous effects of drinking and driving. Nearly one out of every two fatality markers are there because of alcohol involvement.

SDDOT erects signs on the state highway system and provides signs to be placed on county and township roads and city streets. One sign is erected for each person killed, with each sign mounted on a separate post. If a "THINK" sign is erected and a family requests its removal, the SDDOT acts promptly to remove the sign.

Markers will remain in place until they are no longer in satisfactory condition because of sign face damage or deterioration. In these cases, they shall be taken down. Markers which are removed will not be replaced unless so requested by a family member.

The design and layout of the sign was developed by the State Automobile and Casualty Underwriters, Inc. of Des Moines, Iowa, and has been used by the company to mark fatal crash locations for many years. The company discontinued the practice of installing these signs in the 1960s, but it has retained the trademark right to them. SDDOT obtained written approval from the company to use the marker on streets and highways in the state.

Tennessee – No Policy

The Tennessee Department of Transportation (TDOT) does not have a formal policy addressing roadside memorials. TDOT does not sanction the placing of any unauthorized object along state right-of-way. From a practical aspect, the Department does not pursue the removal of memorials due to limited resources and the sensitive nature of the practice; however, if a memorial poses a significant safety hazard, it is removed.

Texas – Allowed

The Texas Department of Transportation (TxDOT) allows the use of highway rights-of-way for certain purposes that can benefit the general public and are also consistent with the safe operation of the state highway system. Because of this, TxDOT presently allows the placement of memorials (typically crosses).

These memorials must be made of wood and no taller than 30 inches. This prevents them from being a hazard if they are struck by a motor vehicle. In addition, they should be placed as close to the right of way line as possible so they are less likely to be hit or to interfere with operations such as mowing. TxDOT's policy does not allow any adornments such as flowers, balloons, pictures, etc. to be placed on the memorials (although TxDOT knows this sometimes takes place) in order to keep the memorial from becoming more distracting to motorists and thus itself become a hazard. The prohibition against adornments is also meant to deter visitors to the memorial. The memorial is intended to be a safety reminder to passing motorists, not a place to be visited because in many cases it is simply not safe for family or friends to regularly stop along the roadsides.

It is not uncommon to have memorials appear on the right-of-way without TxDOT's knowledge. In most cases, these are allowed to remain as long as they do not create safety or operational problems.

Utah – No Response

The Utah Department of Transportation provided no information on their policies.

Vermont – No Policy

The Vermont Department of Transportation does not have a formal policy on roadside memorials. Vermont tries to discourage the placement of memorials. If one is placed, district forces are encouraged to leave it for some time and then discreetly remove the memorial and place it in the district garage for retrieval.

Virginia – Alternate Program

The Virginia Department of Transportation (VDOT) has been mandated by the Virginia General Assembly to implement a roadside memorial program as of July 1, 2003. Because legislation was passed that no funds shall be used to administer the program, the roadside memorial program has been placed on hold in Virginia.

The program will work in which family and friends of the deceased will go to a local VDOT resident engineer to submit an application. The resident engineer will verify the application and select an appropriate location for the marker at or near the crash site. Only one marker will be provided for each fatality. VDOT will make, install, maintain, and remove the marker, free of charge. The cost to VDOT will be \$250 per marker. The marker will remain in place for two years from the date of installation. VDOT will then give the marker to the family should they wish to keep it.

The marker will stand 36 inches tall and be 18 to 24 inches wide. The text on the marker will include a general safety message such as, "Drive Safely. In Memory Of," with the deceased's name being optional.

Washington Allowed

The Washington Department of Transportation (WSDOT) encourages individuals to contact WSDOT to express a desire to place a memorial within WSOT right-of-way. The

type of memorial, location, and duration of allowable placement shall be as mutually agreed to between the family and WSDOT regions, within these guidelines:

- Fatality memorials are not actively “marketed” by the Department. They are used to respond to specific requests for memorials from families and friends of those who have died in highway crashes.
- Requests from friends must include the deceased’s family approval.
- Live plantings are strongly encouraged as the preferred type of memorial. Temporary plaques in conjunction with live plantings can be an effective combination, although the plaques should be removed within six months.
- Memorials other than live plantings should be removed within 12 months from the date of installation.
- The Department strongly discourages family and friends from landscaping or periodically placing flowers, wreaths, ribbons, stuffed animals, etc., at the site.
- Memorials should be installed near the right-of-way line, well removed from the traveled way and other areas requiring frequent maintenance activities, where they pose the minimum safety and liability risk to the traveling public.
- Memorials may be placed on state highways only.
- Requests may be received for memorials along interstate highways where they are not allowed by the Federal Highway Administration, or along other state highways where memorial installations are not feasible. For these locations, educational contributions in the name of the deceased to traffic safety advocates may be suggested as an alternative to memorials.
- The cost of these memorials (purchasing, installing, and maintaining) should be fully borne by the requestors.

West Virginia – Allowed

The West Virginia Department of Transportation allows personal roadside memorials along rights-of-way. House Bill 4063 was passed on March 9, 2000, and allows memorial markers or other tributes on state maintained rights-of-way.

Memorials are divided into two categories, temporary and permanent. Temporary memorials are typically flowers, flags, and other lightweight ornaments. Before placing temporary memorials, the nearest Division of Highways office should be contacted for placement identification and safety considerations. Permanent memorials include more substantial or permanent tributes. With these memorials, a constructor must obtain a formal permit from the appropriate Highways District office. This application is available online.

It is also encouraged that all memorials have an identifiable tag containing a contact name, address, and phone number.

Wisconsin – Not Allowed

Under state statutes, the Wisconsin Department of Transportation (WisDOT) does not allow roadside memorials along highways; however, WisDOT recognizes this will not stop individuals from placing memorials along rights-of-way. A short brochure is available from WisDOT that offers guidelines for placing a memorial.

In this brochure, WisDOT recognizes that some individuals grieve the loss of life from a traffic crash by placing a memorial within a highway right-of-way near the crash site. The placement of memorials is not allowed because they may also pose a safety hazard. Because of these safety reasons, the memorials will be removed if it interferes with roadway safety features or vision, if it negatively impacts the free flow of traffic, and if it would be a hazard if it were hit. A memorial will also be removed if it interferes with routine maintenance, if it falls into disrepair, and if the department receives a complaint. Otherwise, the memorial will typically not be removed. If one is removed, the owner will be attempted to be notified to pick up the memorial.

WisDOT encourages the adoption of a highway as an alternative.

Wyoming – Alternate Program

The Wyoming Department of Transportation (WYDOT) does not allow personal roadside memorials on highway rights-of-way; however an alternate program is encouraged. The Wyoming Roadside Memorial Program has the following criteria:

- Any person who dies in a crash on a Wyoming state highway outside a municipality is eligible to have a memorial sign erected in his or her honor.
- One memorial sign is allowed for each person who dies. A request for the sign must come from the immediate family. It must be made by completing and mailing in the appropriate form.
- WYDOT will erect and maintain the sign. It will be placed as close to the right-of-way fence as possible and well off the traveled way. Installations in urban areas will not be allowed.
- Additionally, signs will not be placed in highway clear zones or drainage ditch areas.
- Memorial signs will remain in place for five years; however, they will be removed sooner if a family member, who originally signed the application request, asks in writing to have the sign removed.
- No private memorials of any type will be allowed. Any that are erected will be promptly removed by WYDOT and held for two weeks to allow retrieval by those who put them up.
- Existing private memorials will be allowed to remain until spring of 2008.

*This appendix should not be used as a guide to interpreting state laws or policies. It simply describes responses received from state agencies on roadside memorial policies and from a survey (*Responses from Other DOTs Regarding Roadside Memorial Policies*). The appropriate agency in each state should be contacted for current policies and information.

** According to the DOT&PF's website, this policy has changed in 2004. Alaska now has a similar policy as West Virginia. A brochure is now printed describing the

appropriate procedures for notifying the DOT&PF of the memorial. No information could be found on the program offering three signs.

***Pennsylvania's policy was categorized as not being allowed despite the indecisive formal policy that has been established.